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THE

MIRACLES OF OUR LORD.

EXPOSITORY AND HOMILETIC.

BY

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To

E. H. L.

PREFACE.

IT has long seemed to the writer that there was room for such treatment of the Gospel Miracles as is here offered. Since the two Series of Notes by the late Archbishop of Dublin became the cherished possession of every preacher, the Parables and the Miracles of our Lord have been more than ever favourite topics of pulpit and class prelection. Trench's *Notes on the Parables* has been followed up during the last twenty years by many valuable expositions from the British and Continental press. The *Notes on the Miracles*, on the other hand, has remained almost the only available book of its kind. Recent theological literature teems with excellent treatises on this theme from the apologetic and philosophical side. It is sufficient to name those of Canon Mozley and Professor Bruce. But on the didactic

aspect, while competent studies of particular miracles, or groups of miracles, are to be had, there is nothing, since Trench, which covers the whole ground. It is true that all good commentaries on the Gospels provide exegetic material, for the preacher and student, on the miracle-narratives. But the advantage of a connected expository view of them cannot be well attained in a comment on the Four Gospels, far less on any one Gospel; while the relation of the miracles to one another, and the lessons to be derived from them as a whole, cannot be treated at all in an ordinary commentary. Hence the lack which the present work is meant in some measure to supply.

The aim is entirely expository and didactic. The Apologetic questions are assumed to have been sufficiently dealt with by other writers. Even within the range chosen, the aim has been necessarily restricted. For full and exact exegesis of the narratives as part of the Gospel record it is always needful to refer to the increasingly rich body of New Testament comment. All that is sought here is to set each incident in the

light of the best exposition. For the spiritual lessons, again, the plan followed is not to collect the entire uses which might be made of each narrative. This would have given a mere outline of homiletic hints, which does not seem a very profitable task, however carefully done. The attempt made is to indicate, under most of the miracles, some one line of spiritual application, and so give an actual instance of their pulpit use. But the method followed is not invariable; a certain liberty of treatment is claimed.

Remarks and references intended for the professional student are mostly thrown to the foot of the page, so that the ordinary reader may have a clear course in the text.

Among several friends from whom useful hints have been received, special mention must be permitted of the Rev. W. Robertson Nicoll, of *The Expositor*, but for whose kind suggestion at the first the volume might never have taken shape.

EDINBURGH, *January* 1890.

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INTRODUCTION.

ARRANGEMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MIRACLES.

SINCE the miracle-narratives form so intrinsic and important a part of the Great Biography recorded in the Gospels, the order in which we treat them deserves some attention. The order of the events themselves would at first sight seem the only admissible one in such treatment as we propose. And to this order, in all its leading points, we adhere. The historical arrangement carries the collateral advantage of making our study of the Gospel miracles an epitome of the life of Christ from one point of view. It also aids the imagination in recalling and presenting them. Reading them in this order, we can walk with Him in spirit as He went about doing good in the curriculum of His earthly life. But another law of grouping calls for attention. The broad distinction between the Nature-miracles and the Redemption-miracles has always asserted itself in all thoughtful treatment. The miracles of Jesus wrought upon external nature, though not without relation to His redeeming work,—indeed bearing very closely on the Revelation of His Person,

and on the rule and preservation of His spiritual kingdom,—are clearly distinguishable from the Healing-miracles, and deserve, therefore, to be treated in their own order and internal connection. Accordingly, it has seemed best, at the expense of some dislocation of historic continuity, to treat the Nature-miracles, as they are called, together in one group, in the order of their actual occurrence, reserving only the one post-Resurrection miracle—the Second Draught of Fishes—for its proper place, at the close of all.

The Redemption-miracles, again, have not only been distinguished from the Nature-miracles, but have been by some (*e.g.* Westcott) subdivided into (*a*) Miracles upon Man,—the Healings and the Raisings; and (*b*) Miracles in the Spirit World,—the Casting-out of Devils; thus assigning the cures of demoniacal possession to a special rubric. For many reasons this division is undesirable, as it is also not strictly logical, for these were miracles on man and miracles of healing. Other still more minute and subtle modes of arranging and distributing the Redemption-miracles have been discarded as interfering with the historical order, which it is of so much importance to preserve. Accordingly, the cures of Possession, like all the other Healing miracles, are considered here in the order and place of their actual occurrence. The only group of Redemption-miracles which easily bears detachment, and which properly stands as climax to the others, is that of the Three Raisings from the Dead. These, therefore, are treated together as the highest of the Lord's redemptive wonders, to which all the others lead up, culminating in the Lazarus-miracle, which stands in immediate historic connection with the close of the Saviour's earthly ministry. We thus arrange the

whole as Nature miracles, Healing miracles, and miracles of Resurrection.*

I. The Nature-Miracles.

These are usually reckoned nine in all, by those who rely on the historicity of the Gospels, and who therefore hold that the Feeding of Four Thousand and the Second Draught of Fishes are actual occurrences and not mistaken duplicates of the narrators. In their succession as to time they stand thus: I. The Beginning of Miracles; II. Simon Peter's Draught of Fishes; III. The Stilling of the Storm; IV. The Miracle of the Loaves; V. Walking on the Water; VI. The Second Miraculous Feeding; VII. The Coin in the Mouth of the Fish; VIII. The Withering of the Fig Tree; IX. The post-Resurrection Miracle. Among themselves they fall into two conspicuously separable classes,—miracles of power and miracles of providence. To the first belong those forming the group I., IV., V., and VI.

* This combination of historic continuity, so far as possible, with rational or logical grouping, must be left to justify itself. None of the other modes of arrangement seemed so satisfactory. Trench's, though at first glance that of succession in time, turns out not to be so. It reverses entirely the order of the demoniac cures, displaces several other incidents—in short, foregoes all other advantages, and does not even attain to that of historical connection. Westcott's suggested arrangement in his fruitful study of thirty years ago, *Characteristics of the Gospel Miracles*, though in many respects attractive, neglects historic succession altogether. It was meant rather as combination for homiletic purposes, than as an order in which the records themselves should be expounded. Steinmeyer's (*The Miracles of our Lord, in relation to Modern Criticism.* Trans. Edin.: T. & T. Clark. 1875), based upon a cunning analysis of the New Testament term for a miracle (*σημεῖον*), as meaning Sign, Symbol, Witness, and Prophecy, and grouping our Lord's wonders accordingly, has all the faults of the most artificial arrangement, while it totally dislocates the order of time.

These relate to events of a kind which never can occur under the ordinary laws of the universe, and which, therefore, directly disclose a Creative or Almighty Power. The other five take their miraculous character from their occurring at the command or foresight of the Redeemer. An unexpected haul of the nets, the sudden cessation of a storm, the finding of a coin in a fish, the instantaneous withering of a tree, as mere events, remain within the category of the natural. To account for their occurrence at His call, we need suppose no suspension of the laws of nature, only a supernatural knowledge on His part of natural facts, and control of natural movements. We are entitled to call them Miracles of Providence because they illustrate His providential function as ruler and governor of the universe ; or, otherwise, because they are actions of the Christ, the Head of the Redemptive Order, as He stands in closest fellowship with the God who governs the world. Those of the first group suggest another form of Divine action and reflect another and different ray of His Christly glory. They are akin to the creative rather than to the providential action of God. The change of water into wine, the multiplying of the loaves, walking upon the water, are acts of Divine supremacy over natural law. We must hold them to occupy, therefore, a peculiar place in their bearing upon the revelation of our Lord's personality.*

The principle on which we derive spiritual lessons from the Gospel miracles, or expound their significance, also demands a few words. That the miracles are to be

* On the important apologetic and philosophical question of the true conception of a miracle consult the clear and comprehensive discussion in Dr. Bruce's *Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, chap. ii., "Miracles in relation to the Order of Nature."

held as not bare attestations of a Divine commission, far less mere wonders; that they are to be studied in their symbolic or didactic aspects as well as in their evidential character, is now an axiom of New Testament exposition. The laws and limits of such spiritual interpretation may not bear exact definition; but we shall not err if we assume them to be "contained implicitly in the spiritual interpretation of the evangelical writers themselves."* The synoptic accounts of the Healings as they teach the nature and place of faith, the feeding of the multitude as expounded in the sermon which followed on "Christ the Bread of Life" (John vi.), the cure of the man born blind as demonstrating Jesus to be the Light of the World (John ix.), are instances sufficient to indicate the line of propriety and truth. We may with its guidance brush aside a great deal of mere allegorizing, both ancient and modern. And keeping to it, we shall never betray the narratives into the hands of those who would see in what they record, not actual occurrences, but only figures of speech. If we keep, in short, to the central position that the Gospel miracles are an integral portion of the revelation made through Jesus Christ, we shall get a view of them which is germane to our purpose. It will, at the same time, be more true to their real character than either that which regards them as mainly evidential on the one hand, or mainly allegorical on the other. Now when we ask what the Gospels reveal, our answer is unhesitating—the Person of Jesus and His relation to the Kingdom of Heaven which He came to establish. In Himself and in His coming for human Redemption He reveals God. He reveals in redeeming, and by

* Westcott, *Characteristics of the Gospel Miracles*, pref., xii.

redeeming He supremely reveals. How this idea will justify and illumine the Healing-miracles of Jesus is obvious. In these He is eminently acting as a Deliverer of men from sin and its effects. He is effectually revealing the self-sacrificing love of Highest God, when He, the Son of God, is seen to bear our infirmities and carry our sicknesses. In relation, however, to the Nature-miracles the idea requires a few words of expansion. That these contain express teaching as to the Kingdom of Heaven and its King will appear as we consider them in detail. Yet it is of use to indicate in general and beforehand how this is to be construed. That this group of miracles must bear a special relation to the Person and Work of Jesus is evident. They are comparatively few. All of this class that were wrought are recorded. They are not, like the Healing-miracles of the Gospel narrative, samples out of a mass which remain untold. Further, they are entirely peculiar to the Gospel history. Apostles healed the sick and even raised the dead, but they never turned water into wine or walked the waves. These miracles must have in them, therefore, an element which, regarded evidentially, is unique. They show Jesus not merely as prophet, messenger, or Messiah in a delegated sense. They declare Him truly Divine and none other than Son of the Highest. To be more definite still, they should be regarded, not as mere proofs or evidences of Divinity in Jesus ; rather as revelations of the God-man. That to which they bear witness is not a mere theological proposition, the thesis of our Saviour's Godhead. It is the fact of the Incarnation. This fact, new and unexampled even in the economy of God's revelation of Himself to men, was then historically unfolding itself among them. The details of the Incarnate Life are so

many *momenta* in that revelation. How important among these details must have been the miracles is obvious. The habit, too persistent among commentators, of telling off the incidents in the sacred Biography as alternately illustrative of the Humanity and of the Divinity of Jesus, has not been a fortunate one. It has an unhappy tendency to split up the Central Figure. When we regard the Personality discovered to us in these narratives as the one, indissoluble God-man; when we note the object of the narratives as the report to mankind at large and for all time of the appearance of that Person, the Epiphany of God incarnate, then alone do we occupy the right point of view for understanding them. From this point we see how momentous in their bearings are the miracles of the Gospel-record, and not least among these the miracles wrought on Nature.

To this we have the unmistakable testimony of the Evangelists themselves. St. John is most explicit in his assertion that the "beginning of miracles" at Cana was intended to manifest the glory of the Word made flesh, Himself the revelation of the Father, full of grace and truth. At the calling of the Fisher-Apostles, the miracle of the Great Draught is described as concentrating their attention on His Person and spiritual Lordship. The Storm-stilling is expressly said to have drawn the thoughts of the beholders as with one consent to the same problem, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" The miraculous Feeding was such a disclosure of prophetic and Messianic greatness as to lead thousands to the conclusion that this was none other than the expected Christ. Yet His own words following led on His disciples to see in it a far grander and deeper revelation of His Person than the outside world could

perceive. Thus for all the miracles, and certainly not least for those wrought on nature, the Incarnation itself is the key. They are full of meaning when we read in them the actual manifestation of the God-man. This, rather than the proof of any abstract proposition as to the Divinity of Jesus, is the truth or fact unfolded by His wonderful works.

The bearing of the Nature-miracles upon the character and claims of His kingdom is also clear, and of all but equal importance. The first miracle was plainly meant "to foreshadow by a symbolic action the nature of the new era He was about to inaugurate, to say in deed what the Evangelist says in word. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The second symbolises the formation of the present Church. The calling of its first founders was thus sealed by a sacramental sign which binds all its servants to their Lord, and to their work as fishers of men. The Storm-incidents tell us of His constant nearness to His servants, through all the present dispensation of the Kingdom. Whether He seem to sleep or to be at a distance, He is always actually within call of His cause and its workers, to protect, refresh, and comfort. The miraculous Feedings, again, represent Him Who is the Bread of Life as the spiritual centre of the Kingdom's influence. The first of them was a test-miracle, and sets forth the spirituality of men's reception of Jesus Christ as the test of their true submission to His Kingdom and its rule. The stater-incident (Matt. xvii. 24) has a bearing on the internal support of the Kingdom and on its relation to other institutions among men. The most singular of the Nature-miracles, the withering of the fig-tree, sets forth Christ as Lord of the Kingdom, more specially as vindicating its

independence of all prescriptive right. In this incident He foreshadows the doom of the favoured nation hitherto identified with the Kingdom of God, but which had forfeited its place. The last of them—the post-Resurrection scene on the Sea of Galilee, has a prophetic bearing on the final success and perfection of the Kingdom of Heaven among men.

II. The Redemption-Miracles.

The miracles of Healing are usually reckoned twenty-one in number. These together with the three Raisings from the Dead and the nine Nature-miracles make up the thirty-three in all of the Gospel narratives. This is Trench's enumeration, and it is the common one. It includes *the healing of Malchus' ear*, which, as not seeming to belong to the miracle-narratives, may be passed over. There are, however, two very briefly narrated acts of casting out an evil spirit, which are omitted by Trench as by most. The one is recorded in the first Gospel only (Matt. ix. 27); the other in two of the synoptics (Matt. xii. 22-7; Luke xi. 14), and has considerable importance, as the occasion of the sharpest controversy between Jesus and His enemies on the topic. These two added would raise the number of all the miracles to thirty-five. Of the Nature-miracles and the Raisings from the Dead all that took place are apparently recorded. It is plain, however, that the twenty or twenty-two Healing-miracles recorded in detail are a mere handful out of the numberless cures which the Lord must have actually wrought. The modesty and repression of the narratives on what constituted the great body of our Lord's wonderful works is everywhere evident.

The modes of grouping these miracles of Redemption are numerous and suggestive. That which concerns their distribution in the four Gospels we pass by as belonging mainly to the apologetic and historic side of our study.* More directly to our purpose is the classification of the Healing-miracles as miracles of personal faith, of intercession, and of love (Westcott). This arrangement divides them into : (*a*) those in which the believing patients made their own appeal to Jesus (*five* in all); (*b*) those in which the cures were asked by friends or relatives (*nine*, if we include the two cases of possession, Matt. ix. and xii.); (*c*) those in which the Lord acted with entire spontaneity, on the impulse of His own love and compassion (*eight*, which would be increased to *eleven* if we added the three Raisings). The grouping of the first two classes suggests the valuable lessons as to the place of Faith, both personal and representative, in the order of salvation which will come so often before us in commenting on the narratives. In regard to the third group, a coincidence—though it is also something more—

* No doubt the distribution of the entire body of miracles in the evangelic narratives has its significance even for a spiritual and interpretative treatment. For example, it is significant that the group of eleven miracles contained in the triple tradition, *i.e.*, occurring in all the three synoptic Gospels, includes at least one specimen of each great class; *e.g.*, two Nature-miracles (the Storm-stilling and the Feeding of Five Thousand); eight Healing-miracles, two of them instances of expulsion (the Gadarene demoniac and the lunatic boy); and one Restoration from the Dead, the daughter of Jairus. In short, these eleven are typical; and being well-accredited themselves, serve to accredit those narratives in the other Gospels in which other instances but no other kinds of miracles are recorded. All this justifies the view usually taken of their classification and connection as one body of mighty and merciful acts. (See Dr. Bruce in capp. iii and iv. *op. cit.*, "The Miracles in their relation to the Witnesses and the Records.")

deserves notice. The unsolicited Healings were, with only one apparent exception (that of the Gadarene demoniac), those done on the Sabbath day. The prevailing religious scruple about Sabbath-work accounts for the absence of request in most of these cases. The other class of unsolicited acts of His almighty love explains itself. No one ventured to ask Him to raise the dead. In the three instances in which He did so, He acted solely upon His own motion.

A classification of the Healing-miracles is sometimes undertaken based upon the kinds of disease or of organic defect removed. The use of such a study to the Christian apologist is to show that the diseases and infirmities healed by Jesus were either such as are incurable by human means, or such as when cured in the course of nature are never entirely removed on the instant, as were these. Several of them were diseases specially common in the East at the time. In short, all of them are "well-chosen cases, the healing of which under the circumstances peculiar to each could not be ascribed to human skill."* For our purpose, this classification has one valuable hint. Human maladies, in all their sad variety, are at root effects of sin, and are therefore symbolically related to moral evil, so that their removal by Jesus has certain distinct teachings as to the multiplex virtues and effects of His saving grace. This kind of symbolism has been most frequently illustrated by reference to His cleansing of the lepers.

* *Our Lord's Miracles of Healing, considered in relation to Medical Science.* T. W. Belcher, M.D. (now Rev. Dr. Belcher, Bristol). Oxford, 1872. The chapters of this brief and purpose-like treatise are arranged upon the principle above stated: Fevers; Paralysis; Leprosy; Demoniacal Possession (and Lunacy), etc.

There is no reason why it should not be more generally and broadly construed. If leprosy specially represents the defilement of sin and the isolation from God and good which it entails, blindness and deafness may represent the corresponding loss of man's spiritual perceptions; paralysis, the deadening of the moral nature under sin—our spiritual inability to serve God, or to attain salvation. Possession is a terrible allegory of the bondage of the sinner in the grasp of Satan; and physical death, of the last dread fruitage which sin brings forth when it is finished. It was fitting that He Who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil should show Himself conqueror over these lesser ills, in detail, and thus predict in figure and symbol His larger victory. The cleansing of the leper figures forth His removal of sin's defilement and His restoring us to the fellowship of God; opening blind eyes, His dispelling our darkness and gifting us with spiritual sight; making the palsied rise up and walk, the power to lead a new life, with which He seals His pardons; casting out devils, His entry as strong Son of God into our world to dispossess its evil prince; recalling the dead, that entire spiritual resurrection of which He is the source and centre. Indeed, this line of thought leads beyond mere analogy. It brings us to the real import of the healing ministry of Jesus as a revelation of redemption. These works must be regarded not as mere evidences of His power and commission to redeem; nor as mere figures or emblems of redemption. They were themselves an integral part of His redemptive work. When He cared for poor sick people and restored their bodily health, when He relieved the lunatic and the maniac from their mental tortures and recalled them to quietness and sanity, when He set the

possessed free from the yoke of demons, He was setting His seal on man's entire nature, body, mind, and spirit, as precious to Him. He was claiming it for God, and He was doing in it a part of the same redeeming work which He completed when He drew men from their sinful life into pardon and peace. In a number of instances the bodily healings are accompanied or followed up by an express dealing with the subjects of them as to their deliverance from sin. See the instances of the man let down through the roof, the paralytic at Bethesda, and the man born blind. These are sufficient to establish the principle. It was as the Friend of man and the Saviour of sinners that Jesus wrought His miracles of healing. When He thus bare their infirmities He was not merely prefiguring His passion, He was doing part of the same work which He accomplished on the tree. When He restored sight, strength, and health to man's corporeal frame, He was giving an earnest of that complete salvation which includes the redemption of the body. These works were not so much parables or pictures of redemption as themselves redemptive acts. It is one great necessity that is presented to the eye of redeeming love in man's sin and his misery. It is one strong redeemer who is risen up to destroy the works of the devil in the physical and the moral sphere alike. The one gospel of glad tidings is preached in our Lord's deeds of mercy and in His words of truth. The whole healing ministry, in short, was a grand proclamation of redemption. The proclamation by miracle was one fitted to engage men's attention at the outset, for the evils it dealt with were such as all men could appreciate. Yet was it far more than a mere bid for their attention. He proclaims a whole salvation from evil, root and

branch, when He presents Himself as the physician of a sin-sick world.

The special questions involved in some of the narratives of healing will be best considered in commenting on the accounts themselves. The most difficult of them, that of *demoniacal possession*, is no exception. It should be studied in its connection with the evangelic history. But a brief general conspectus of that group of miracles may be in place here. There are seven detailed instances of the kind in the Gospels. Of these the earliest in point of time is: 1. That of the demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum (Mark and Luke). Then, 2. the man of Gadara (Matt., Mark, Luke); 3. The man with a dumb spirit (Matt. ix. 32). 4. The man both blind and dumb (Matt. xii. 22; Luke xi. 14). 5. The Syrophenician's daughter (Matt., Mark). 6. The lunatic boy (Matt., Mark, Luke). 7. The woman with a spirit of infirmity (Luke xiii.). Besides these specified cases, general references to the expulsion of evil spirits by Jesus and to their action in His presence occur in all the synoptic Gospels, *e.g.*, Matt. iv. 24, viii. 16; Mark i. 34, 39, iii. 11; Luke iv. 41. In the fourth Gospel neither references nor instances are found. Any idea of personal opinion on St. John's part adverse to the fact of demoniacal possession is excluded by the record (Mark ix. 38) of that Apostle's jealousy on the score of the power given to him and to his fellow-disciples to cast out devils. The distribution of these narratives in the Gospels, however, and even the silence of the fourth Gospel on the topic, is suggestive. This evangelist gives large prominence to the Judean and Jerusalem ministry; none of the cases mentioned in any Gospel occur in that part of the country. The general statements all relate what took place in the

northern districts. Three of the detailed cases are Galilean, and the other four occurred in localities at least semi-heathen. It is certainly fitted to throw some light on the whole subject of possession, when we note that the Scripture records include no case in the Old Testament under the strict *régime* of the Theocracy, in the New Testament none within the central districts of Judaism; that those occurring in the Gospel history all take place either in Galilee or on the outskirts of Palestine, those recorded in the Acts of the Apostles in Samaritan or heathen cities; the one apparent exception being St. Peter's cures in Jerusalem (Acts v. 16), where, however, it is expressly said that those vexed with unclean spirits, like the other sufferers on that occasion, were brought into the capital out of the cities round about [τῶν πέριξ πόλεων]. This geographical distribution is paralleled by their apparent limitation as to time. Their frequent occurrence in the time of Jesus and His Apostles, with their comparative infrequency before and since, is another significant fact. The question to which the modern mind turns most eagerly is, whether it is not possible to explain possession as simply a popular fallacy by which certain mental or nervous diseases were assigned to demoniac influence as their cause. The explanation labours under the grave disadvantage to all Christian minds of reflecting heavily either on the Saviour's knowledge or alternatively on something still more vital. But indeed in the hands of any candid inquirer it breaks down before the facts. The explanation assumes that mania and other mental or nervous disorders are those which the Jews of the day ascribed to possession, and that this was their way of accounting for such forms of human ailment. But this is disproved by the

narratives themselves. Not mania only, but epilepsy, dumbness, blindness, and in one case spinal or dorsal paralysis, are included among infirmities due in a certain sense to possession, whereas in other cases the same infirmities are described as present without possession. To say that this was a theoretic or imaginary cause by which mental and nervous diseases were in evangelic times accounted for, is not possible, so long as we cannot limit the diseases to be so explained. That certain individual sufferers were regarded as under demoniac influence, while others in almost all respects similarly afflicted were not so regarded, is the fact against which this modern hypothesis must for the present at least go to pieces. If a solution exists in this direction it has not yet been found. Our Lord's own words on the subject of possession and its cure lift the whole topic into a higher region. Possession is a part of Satanic working which was brought to light mainly by the Lord's own coming. His entry "first binds the strong one," disturbs the kingdom of darkness and prepares for its overthrow. Jesus does not, however, regard the poor demoniacs as sinners *par excellence*. It is not to them He addresses His "Go, and sin no no more." The terrible phrase, "Ye are of your father the devil," he applies to a very different class of people. He grasps in his discourses the idea of a kingdom of God which is to displace the Satanic,—to dispossess it of both realms, that of physical evil and oppression on the one hand, that of moral disorder and sin on the other. The possessed are under the tyranny of Satan. The Son of God is come to set them free. They, like all other sinners, are under the moral yoke of sin; from this also He is come to deliver. This which is His main work carries the other with it. Now this view

of Jesus is radical to His entire teaching and ministry. We must hold fast with Him on both sides of His teaching if we are to understand His doctrine and practically enter into His work. If we rationalize and explain away Christ's view of physical and psychical evil, we shall find ourselves at length rejecting His view of moral evil. The strong Christian doctrine of sin and its effects brings into the light of a redemptive revelation the entire foundation of evil. Hence its practical force. Christ and Christians are bound to war against the moral and the physical evils of mankind alike, for both belong to the prince of this world who is to be cast out.

One other group of the miracles is bound together by an ethical rather than a physical link of connection, viz., *the Sabbath Healings.* As the cures of possession led up to the sharpest break of Jesus with the leaders of His nation,—formed indeed the occasion of their throwing themselves into bitter and blasphemous opposition to His kingdom ; so His Sabbath cures wounded them in their tenderest sensibilities, as keepers and expounders of the law, and brought them to the brink of His murder. Seven of the detailed miracles were done on the Sabbath, besides, probably, others described in general terms. The first two, the cure of the demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum and the raising of Peter's wife's mother out of fever, occurred on the same day. These occasioned apparently no controversial remark. All the others involve this element. The cure of the withered hand, the woman under a spirit of infirmity, and the instance of the dropsical man, are recorded with the Sabbath controversy full in view. The two of St. John's Gospel (chaps. v. and ix.) bring it into the centre, for the

resolving of this strife was evidently one of the main doctrinal purposes which the author of the Fourth Gospel had in view in relating so prominently these two Sabbath healings. The general principles illustrated in these cases may be here summarized. In the first two Sabbath cures and the many healings which followed on the evening of that day, we see Jesus taking possession of the Sabbath to baptize it with the Spirit of His Gospel. In the three that follow, He illustrates the humane purposes of the Sabbath. It is an institution germane to the ministry of compassion: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." He also declares His own claim as Messiah to develop and enlarge its scope. If in any measure it belonged to that law of carnal commandments which was fixed in ordinances, the higher law of Christ has now taken it up. The Sabbath was made for man, and the Son of Man, the Head of the New Humanity, is Lord also of the Sabbath day. Here the controversy between Him and His foes reached a point of entire success on His part. They deemed that when they had condemned Him and His healing work under cover of Jehovah's Sabbath law they had righteousness and justice on their side. But He appeals to the original intention of the Sabbath. He takes it up as its reformer and its Lord. He reduces them to entire silence upon their own premises and exceptions, and when we pass on to the last two instances, those recorded in St. John's Gospel, we find they have no arguments left. In the story of the man born blind, they simply persist in denying the fact of the miracle because the alleged worker of it is in their account a transgressor, and "God heareth not sinners." In the instance of the man at the pool the contest reaches another climax. Jesus in His vindicatory words takes

the Sabbath question up to a still higher platform. It was founded, as He and they agree, upon the Creator's resting on the seventh day. But their narrow and bigoted interpretation of what is work and rest go altogether to the ground when the nature of God's resting is understood, when His working is seen to be in another sense ceaseless; and as the Father, so also the Son. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Argument was then at an end. So far as they were concerned, beaten out of that field, shamed before the people who rejoiced in His deeds of mercy, there was nothing left them but to resolve upon His destruction. These two Jerusalem Sabbath-cures are related in the fourth Gospel, as is the climax-miracle of the raising of Lazarus, among other reasons, for the purpose of showing the steps by which the leaders of the nation arrived at their fatal conclusion. It is obvious that the relation of Jesus to the Sabbath question, as worked out in these narratives, is very far from that which modern anti-Sabbatism supposes. Indeed it is the very reverse. Only on the supposition that the Sabbath was a sacred and inviolable institution could there be a unique pre-eminence in being its Lord. Those who refuse to see in Jesus' words and acts here the grandest claim to secure Sabbath rest and its mercy for man, as well as to raise and transform it for the spiritual purposes of His Church and Kingdom, are as blind to His real meaning and aims as were the Pharisees themselves.

The Raisings from the Dead form the last and highest group of the Redemptive-miracles. The general questions which these suggest will be best considered in commenting on the actual instances in detail.

It has been already made sufficiently plain that we are to deal with the spiritual lessons of the Gospel

miracles, not with the apologetic questions arising out of these or any other of the miraculous narratives of Scripture. The central proposition to which all believing theologians and exegetes unhesitatingly assent, that the Gospel miracles form an important, constitutive part of the Revelation of Christ's Person and Work, is enough for our purpose. They are not to us mere signs, the evidential value of which has passed away. The need for their actual, historical occurrence no doubt passed. It was due at a particular date; it belonged to the era of His personal manifestation; but, having once occurred, the record of them remains an integral part of the Revelation, and the reception and impression from that record, an essential part of the faith of those who accept the Revelation. On the same principle, there is no call for defence or explanation of the mode in which the miracles occurred in detail. A miracle is a miracle. Elaborate explanations of how the occurrence may be conceived to have taken place simply render their constructors ridiculous. The older, rationalistic methods of explaining away the miraculous element in these acts of Jesus have long since become the laughing-stock of educated Christendom. The laborious attempts of otherwise believing theologians, such as Weiss and Beyschlag, in our own day, to reduce the supernatural element in the narrative to a minimum, are already far on the way to appear almost equally ridiculous. From its very nature as an immediate Divine operation, the miracle admits no explanation of mode or process. All such attempts are self-contradictory. They are suggestions of secondary reasons or causes for that which *ex hypothesi* has only a Great First Cause.

Finally, as regards the records themselves, no theory

of mechanical, verbal inspiration is assumed when we assume their substantial historicity. But accepting this *bonâ fide*, we do not find ourselves at liberty to proceed as if the Gospel writers had on some occasion mistaken a parabolic or figurative speech for an actual transaction, or a divergent tradition of the same event for a distinct and repeated occurrence. The second miraculous Feeding, the Coin in the Fish's Mouth, the Blasting of the Fig-tree, must be unhesitatingly accepted as facts by those who accept once for all the historicity of the records. The narrators give these as actual occurrences. To proceed to correct their record, as if they were childish or incompetent recorders, does not seem very reasonable criticism. It is to carry revenge for the mechanical theory of inspiration to an extreme which is sure to recoil some day on the heads of those who indulge it. A few years will soon leave sere and dry a good deal of our present proposed redaction of the Sacred Biography.

I.

THE NATURE-MIRACLES.

I.

THE WATER MADE WINE.

JOHN ii. 1-11.

THAT this miracle should be expressly designated by the Evangelist who alone records it as the "beginning of the signs" which Jesus did, prepares us for several inferences as to its character, as well as for some peculiarities in the record of it. Before all, it rules out as wholly fabulous the traditionary miracles of the Infancy and Youth. Then, it suggests the pre-eminently emblematic or symbolic bearing of the act. It is plain that the author of the Fourth Gospel attends to what the miracles teach rather than to what they prove; that he has in view not so much the marvellous in them, as the significant. That he should supply this account of the first of all the Lord's mighty works —one of signally prophetic meaning—is exactly what we should expect. It is true, no working out of the spiritual symbol follows the record of the incident in this case, as it does in most of the other miracle-narratives of St. John's Gospel. But the prologue, and indeed the whole of the first chapter, more especially the conversation with Nathanael at its close, has led up to it. And the hint conveyed in the concluding words here (ver. 11) is unmistakable. Thus

was begun the "beholding of His glory," while "the Word made flesh dwelt among us" (i. 14). Once more, that it was the first of the miracles may account for the paradoxical elements in the transaction and the exegetic puzzles of the narrative. These are best solved by the straightforward assumption that the thing actually took place at the time and in the way recorded. Whatever begins a series of unwonted acts, and so marks the entrance of the Life recorded upon a new stage, may well be surrounded with difficulties such as confessedly belong to this passage of the Gospel history.

Vv. 1, 2. "*And the third day . . . to the marriage.*" These opening words show the strict sequence of the story with what has gone before—a sequence which is of moment for our interpretation of the miracle. "The third day" is probably to be reckoned from the departure of Jesus from that part of the Jordan district where the calling of the five disciples had taken place, as detailed in the preceding chapter. Surrounded by this first circle of believing followers, He had now arrived at the little Galilean town of which Nathanael, the latest convert of the five, was a native (xxi. 2).* Here, at a marriage feast, was found the "mother of Jesus." This evangelist never uses her name any more than he does his own or that of James his brother —a delicate note of authenticity. She was in some

* From early Christian centuries the place has been identified with the existing village of Kefr Kenna, about five miles from Nazareth, on the road to Tiberias. Dr. Robinson's attempt to transfer the identification to the lonely site of Khurbet Kâna, eight or nine miles to the north, is now thought to have been founded on misinformation, and opinion generally has recurred to the older view. See Farrar's *Life of Christ*, i., 161; and Rev. A. Henderson's *Palestine* (Handbook), § 108.

charge on the occasion, perhaps as related to the bridal pair. On her account Jesus and His party, on their arrival, were invited, and accepted the invitation. Such are the mere outward connections. But we must think that between this narrative and that which has preceded it there is a deeper connection than that of time or place. The manifestation of Him Who has just been named "Son of God" and "Son of man" (i. 49, 51) was now begun—at least, within the circle of His followers. From this time forth, these five first disciples, and those who should be added to them, were to find that wherever Jesus came, there was "heaven opened," and the glory of the Only Begotten was to be seen.

Vv. 3, 4. "*And when they wanted wine . . . Mine hour is not yet come.*" "When the wine failed" (R.V.). Various reasons have been suggested why Mary went to Jesus about the failure of the wine. The want was no doubt partly due to the sudden accession to the company which His arrival with His following had brought about. It was natural she should tell her Son, in Whom she had always found a wise counsellor. But what good did she expect by consulting Him on such an occasion? One commentator—Bengel—quaintly suggests that she wished Him to rise and go, that the other guests might follow His example, and so relieve the entertainer. Another—Calvin—still more quaintly, that she wanted Him to entertain the guests with some of His discourse, and so make them forget that the wine was done. We have no reason to think she had any instance to warrant her in expecting a miraculous interposition, for what followed was the beginning of His miracles. But the most natural explanation, after all, is that, cherishing her well-grounded faith in Him

as Messiah, seeing Him now for the first time an openly accredited teacher, surrounded by believing disciples, catching up sympathetically the elevated tone of the company fresh from Jordan's banks, she believed that the hour of His public manifestation to Israel was come, and deemed it not unlikely that by some stroke of power He would relieve the present situation. If this be so, then it is easy to understand how the expression of her expectation should have been met as it was.

"*Woman.*" In the address itself there is no harshness such as the English word conveys to our ears. The same word was used when He spoke, in tones of deepest tenderness, from the Cross, confiding her to the care of His loving and faithful disciple (xix. 26).* Yet there is in it a very definite hint. It is not "Mother!" but "Woman!" The word showed that He must now gently disengage Himself from mere home and family environment. Henceforth He Who had been known as Mary's son was to become more even than the Jews' Messiah, or the local King of Israel. He was the Christ, the Saviour of the world. Reproof, moreover, though of gentle kind, is conveyed in the words that follow: "*What have I to do with thee?*" This proverbial expression, as used in Scripture, has a flexibility of application not represented by the English phrase.† Its general sense has been fairly put thus: 'Let Me alone; what is there common to thee and Me?

* Farrar suggests, in addition, that if our Lord spoke, as is likely, in Aramaic, the word would be אנתה, not אישה, *i.e.*, more like *domina* than *femina*.

† *τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί.* For the varied use, cf. Josh. xxii. 24; Judges xi. 12; 2 Sam. xvi. 10, xix. 22; 1 Kings xvii. 18; 2 Kings iii. 13; Matt. viii. 29; Mark i. 24; Luke viii. 28.

We stand in this matter on altogether different grounds" (Trench). May we not assume that Mary's suggestion was met in this way, because it savoured of that false and mistaken idea of Messiah's kingdom which Jesus had so oft to repudiate in His public life, and which had been presented in its grossest form at the Temptation: "Make yourself the Christ of the Jews by force of wonders so striking that none shall be able to resist them"?

The request implied in Mary's appeal was granted in one sense, though put aside in another. Such, at least, seems to be the effect of the rather enigmatical saying, "*Mine hour is not yet come.*" This can hardly mean, as it is often taken, that not yet, but in a few minutes, would be the proper time for the miracle. Not till the wine was wholly exhausted would His hour have arrived. As yet it was only failing. Otherwise He might have seemed to mingle elements rather than to change them.* Such a meaning is too trivial. The true explanation must preserve the significance of the phrase His "hour"—a *vox signata* all through the sacred narrative for His showing to mankind as the God-appointed Sufferer and Saviour. That "hour" is not yet come. The thing almost anticipated by Mary is going to be done, but her thoughts of it are not His. No immediately outward effect will follow. The showing unto His true Israel to take place now is of an inward, spiritual, and preparatory kind. This work, now to be wrought, was for the sake only of the little band of believing followers, and would have no startling public consequence. Grace had won to Him these honest young hearts, and for them He should do this beginning of His signs and manifest

* Augustine, quoted by Trench.

forth His glory; but His "hour," in the larger sense, was not yet come.*

Vv. 5-8. "*His mother saith unto the servants. . . . And they bare it.*" The amount of rebuke intended, whatever it was, must have been "mitigated by the manner of speaking it." Plainly, too, Mary saw "in His seeming denial a real granting of her desire. She not merely nothing doubts His compliance, but in some degree guesses at and even indicates" (Trench) "the form of it in these words to the servants," *i.e.*, the friends who assisted or attended to the guests.† The first necessity after a journey in the East is to wash the feet, and before a meal to wash the hands. Hence the presence of the six water-jars, capable of holding from ten to twenty gallons each, was appropriate and convenient when so many guests were gathered. Jesus bids fill them with water, and the servants filled them to the brim. The enormous quantity of water thus provided is made prominent. Then He bids them draw and bear to the guests, beginning with him who sat at the head of the table as ruler or steward (R.V.). What they now drew was wine; and this, whether on the more common understanding of the narrative that they took it from the pots they had filled with water, or on the less usual but exegetically accurate one,‡ that, having drawn all

* This exegesis is supported by a precisely parallel saying recorded in vii. 6. He is urged by His yet unconvinced kindred to go up to the capital and prove Himself openly to be Messiah. He answers, "My time is not yet come." The word is καιρὸς, as here it is ὥρα; but the idea is the same. In that case, also, the suggestion is complied with. He did afterwards quietly go up to the Feast. Yet the "hour of Christ," the time of His revelation to mankind, had not arrived even then.

† The word is διάκονοι, not δοῦλοι.

‡ Westcott's. See his *Com.* on this Gospel *in loc.*

this quantity of water from the well or spring, they "drew on" now from the original source. In either case the fact is satisfied by the simple statement that what they bore to the guests was wine, whether drawn from the filled jars or from the original well. There is no need at all for the assumption that any of the liquid was wine except that which the servants carried and the guests tasted.* That this was wine, and wine of the best, is set forth by the graphic touch which follows.

Vv. 9, 10. *"When the ruler of the feast had tasted . . . thou hast kept the good wine until now."* The miracle could not have been more conclusively proved to be real. Water only was taken from that well whence the jars were filled. This the servants could testify. Wine it was when presented to the guests. This the *architriclinos* testified in unconscious simplicity, when, knowing not whence it came, he pronounces it good—so good that he must hail the bridegroom and humorously charge him with departure from all ordinary customs, thus under cover of playful rebuke paying the highest compliment to him and to the wine. Nothing could be more complete, as a simple and convincing arrangement of facts. But how differently is the miracle done from what human imagination could have suggested, from what the original suggestor herself—shall we say?—expected. The guests go on enjoying the wine till the conclusion of the banquet, without the consciousness that any such work has been wrought. Instead of

* Thus we rid ourselves of the groundless supposition that the "quantity was enormous" (Trench). "The force of the words would favour the idea, rather, that only the water that was drawn from the vessels underwent the marvellous transmutation, and that the process took place in the transition" (Dr. Hugh Macmillan, *The Marriage in Cana*, p. 148).

calling for a pause, summoning all attention, making the company observe the water in the jars, and then with solemn and sudden action converting it into wine, He furnishes this munificent and princely supply, as it were by stealth, with the connivance of the attendants, and letting it be fully known only to His mother and to His disciples.

Two clauses in the narrative have been felt to have significance in pointing out the results. "The servants who drew the water knew"—they only, and not the guests—whence the wine came. Active participation in the service of Christ's kingdom is the way to a perception of its secrets. "His disciples believed on Him." Whatever knowledge of that wonder might by-and-bye become general, it is plain that no immediate stir was made by it, and that none was intended. For those who had faith in Him already, did Jesus mainly disclose His glory. How clearly this evidential principle of His was present to the mind of the Evangelist comes out afresh in the record of the second sign which Jesus did in Cana (iv. 43-54). See *infra*, on *The Healing of the Courtier's Son*.

Let us now look at the fact, the mode, and the motive of this miraculous act.

That it was a miracle, a creation-miracle, the turning of water into wine, stands on the face of the record.* Every attempt to reconcile belief in the record with an evasion of the creative act implied in it has been a failure. Such suppositions as that the spiritual elevation of the guests under the power of the Lord's discourse made them think that to be wine which was only water (Ewald), or that He gave to that which still

* Cf. John iv. 46 : ἐποίησε τὸ ὕδωρ οἶνον.

remained water the force and sap of wine (Neander *) or even that this was a supply of wine produced in the ordinary way and providentially arriving in the nick of time at the believing prayer or omniscient foresight of the Saviour (Weiss), will not satisfy the fact, nor the plain and honest meaning of the recording Evangelist, an eye-witness of the wonder. Nor can we be in any doubt as to what was actually produced. It was what in all the languages spoken by man is understood as wine; a gift of God's bounty more misused indeed by men than most,—all the more blameable they. But that either this wine which Jesus now made or that which He afterwards used at His communion table was anywise different in its qualities and effects from the wine which those countries usually produce would not have entered into any reasonable mind to conceive, except for a foregone conclusion. It is an insult to the common sense of any plain reader of Scripture to ask him to believe that the wines of the Bible were not intoxicating when used in excess. That our Lord's first miracle should have consisted in the abundant supply of a gift which the receivers might possibly have abused (though there is everything in the narrative to imply that they did not) will occasion no more difficulty to any reasonable mind than that as Creator of the world and Author of nature He should have put at the disposal of mankind the produce of the vine.

Some of those who rest in the fact of the miracle and regard it as creative have vainly attempted to conceive and describe the *mode* in which it was wrought. It has long been usual to suggest that this act may be

* "Intensified the powers of water into those of wine" (*Life of Christ*, p. 176, English translation).

thought of on the analogy of nature's work; that what was done here in a moment was the same thing which is done in countless vineyards year by year. "The essence of the miracle," says Olshausen, "consists in divinely effecting the acceleration of the natural process." * So also Augustine long ago.†

The analogy is tempting, but we gain nothing by it as an explanation. Indeed, it is impossible, and after all inept. There is no real parallel. We can trace these processes in nature; but here we can trace no process. Should we attempt it, we should speedily wander from the analogy. We should have to imagine not only accelerated processes of nature, but also those artificial changes, anticipated and condensed, by which the fruit of the vine becomes a beverage—the ripening of the wine as well as of the grape. There are no natural laws by which water in a well or in a jar will change into wine. Nature never would do this, however long time you gave her. True, nature does every year prepare that of which men make wine. That is the ordinary mode of the Divine working, the usual exercise of the Divine efficiency, and we call it the law of nature. But here was another mode of working, equally Divine, though wholly inscrutable and extraordinary. Here were no vines, no summer blossoms, no autumn fruit, no stored and seasoned vintages. By the direct and simple *fiat* of Him "Who giveth all" wine was produced in abundance for the comfort of this wedding company.

Finally, for the *Purpose*. One of the main difficulties, according to some expositors, is the absence of sufficient motive. This is a miracle, they say, without a moral

* *On the Gospels*, iii., 373 (Clark's translation).

† "Ipse fecit vinum in nuptiis . . . qui omni anno hoc facit in vitibus."

end. The negative critics go further, and disparage it as being so unlike Christ's other labours, wrought usually for the relief of the needy, for the comfort of the sick and sad. Here was a needless display of power, to increase the hilarity of a marriage party—a Luxury-wonder, or miracle of Ostentation. The mind of the recording Evangelist as to the motive becomes clear enough, from the pre-eminent place which he has assigned to the work. It is placed at the outset of the fourth Gospel, with the evident intention of showing (1) that Jesus struck a key-note to His ministry so entirely contrasted with that of the Baptist, whose disciples these first followers of Jesus had originally been.* It betokened the exchange of an ascetic, or legal, for a free, human, and joyous form of piety; the transition from a lower and earthlier to a higher and more universal form of the Divine religion—a form not so easy as that of separation and asceticism, but the truest and deepest consecration of the human spirit in all things to God. Who can miss the significance of this scene in which the "Son of man came eating and drinking"—this scene which imparts a touch of universal humanity to the Gospel of Jesus, which in His name sanctifies common life and human joy, beautifies the marriage tie and the family affections, sets on the fore-front of His miracles and in the heart of His ordinances the use of a bounty too frequently abused? Who can fail to see that in all this the objections above alluded to have been answered by the Master Himself? In all ages the children of this world's market-place have made their objections, not founded on the reality of the case, but drawn from their own obdurate blindness to all Divine manifestation. The older and austerer form

* See Olshausen, iii., 374.

of revealed religion was too narrow and gloomy. It was "mad and had a devil." The new form—the religion of Christ—must be strait-jacketed and blind-folded. If it venture to walk open and free as its Founder meant, the old objection is transferred from Himself to it: "Behold, a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." (2) Nor can the objection about the triviality of the occasion justify itself, as if it were the mere relieving of a dinner-table dilemma. Rather the reverse is the true inference. The gracious Lord has sympathy with all needs, the finer as well as the commoner. He Who multiplied the loaves for the relief of a hungry congregation might increase the store of wine for the resolving of a social perplexity. The minor graces and courtesies of life are taken account of, in Christianity, as well as the sterner realities. Indeed, who shall say there is no direct moral end in this action? Contrast with His strictness as to His own extremest needs Jesus' readiness to aid others by His wonder-working. Recall how this narrative stands in almost the same relative place in the fourth Gospel as that of the Temptation in the first and third. He Who will do no miracle at the suggestion of Satan, Who will yield to no demand of selfishness or ambition the use of His Divine power, wrought His first miracle at the suggestion of social and family kindness. (3) But, indeed, to search for an exact necessity as *motive* here is to miss the whole point. These wedding guests could have done without more and better wine. It is a miracle of Superfluity if you will. The Well-spring of Grace and Truth in Jesus Christ overflows at the first onset. He is come to give life, and more abundant. In this He is a faithful Image of the Creator and Upholder of all, who has no esteem

for bare existence, but is ever enriching and beautifying human life, "filling men's hearts with food and gladness." Allow the Gospel-writer to be his own interpreter, and the moral glory of this miracle becomes clear. It is placed in the front of the Miracle-record not merely to point a contrast between the Saviour's ministry and that of the Baptist, but to show how the new economy surpasses the old. The miraculous ministry of Israel's Leader began with turning water into blood, a miracle of judgment. The Gospel-miracles commence with a wonder of kindliness and beneficence. Just as the plagues of Egypt contrast with the healings of Galilee and Judea, so does this banquet-miracle introduce us to the blessings of the Kingdom in its highest and final dispensation. In this act the commonest gift of nature, the merest necessity of human existence—pure water—became the vehicle of a higher power. "So it is the peculiarity of Christ's Spirit and labours, the peculiarity of the work of Christianity, not to destroy what is natural, but to ennoble and transfigure it; to enable it, as the organ of Divine powers, to produce effects beyond its original capacities." *

Nor let us fail to catch the inspiration of that unconscious prophecy, so appropriately conveyed in the words of the happy wedding guest: "Thou hast kept the good wine until now." The application of this saying, to mark the difference between the way of the world and the way of Christ, has been enshrined in the well-known words of Jeremy Taylor, and in the hymn of Keble.† In closer keeping with the Evangelist's line of thought we may apply it to express the increasing richness of Divine Revelations. The weak

* Neander, *Life of Christ* (Bohn's translation), p. 177.

† See quotation and allusion in Trench on this miracle.

and beggarly elements of the former dispensation are succeeded by the new wine of the Kingdom. He Who spake to the fathers by the prophets hath spoken to us by His Son. This whole transaction reveals His glory as the Bringer of the final and highest dispensation. In Jesus Christ, God "has kept His best till last."

In fine, it is plainly meant that we should see in this work an epitome of the Lord's entire miraculous activity. In it all His glory is His grace and love. In the Nature miracles we are to note how always He is "not ministered unto, but ministers." In the Healing miracles we see the power of the wonder-worker constantly merged in the tenderness of the Saviour, telling, *e.g.*, the paralytic his sins were forgiven ere He commanded him to rise up and walk, following the man healed at Bethesda into the temple that He might charge him to go and sin no more, bidding the mother by the gate of Nain dry her tears ere He restored her son, carrying consolation into the bereaved home at Bethany ere He cried with power, "Lazarus, come forth." What a wealth of revelation in this whole body of miraculous transaction! What an Epiphany of Jesus Christ, of which the spiritual mode and meaning are, so to say, anticipated in this the first of them; an unfolding of glorious power, of unselfish care, of human fellowship, of symbolic truth! No wonder he who saw and recorded it lays emphasis on this "beginning of miracles," as that in which "He manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."

II.

SIMON PETER'S DRAUGHT OF FISHES.

LUKE v. 1-11.

1. THE SCENE opens upon a delicious glimpse of our Lord's Galilean ministry, His week-day work, His every-day human intercourse. It is morning. In the fresh early hour Jesus is walking by the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret, in the neighbourhood of some populous village; walking by Himself for refreshment and meditation. By this time He has become well known to passers-by. The fisher people and townsfolk catch sight of Him, crowd round Him group after group closes in, till His walk is brought to a standstill. He feels impelled to address them, casts His eyes about for an elevation from which to speak,—not easy to be found on the level shore. He sees two boats standing close to land; the fishers, just gone out of them, their night's work over, were washing their nets hard by. The boats belonged to four young men, His recent converts and disciples. Entering one of the craft, which was Simon's, He asks His friend to push her a little off, so as to command the multitude with more ease. Then, with the prow for His pulpit, He teaches the people who stand crowded and clustered before Him on the rising beach. Jesus

carefully honoured all the means of grace in the Divine institutions of His time and nation; a glance at the preceding chapter of Luke's Gospel shews Him preaching in the most regular and accepted circumstances,—on the Sabbath day, in the synagogue, during the ordinary course of public worship, conducted in every particular —except perhaps that slight one of His sitting down to speak—exactly as any rabbi or elder of the Jews would have conducted it. Here you have something different — week-day ministry, open-air preaching, a quite *extempore* service, an occasional and entirely singular pulpit; but all so like the mission on which He came to earth, that, in season or out of season, He might proclaim the Kingdom of God.

2. The Deed or Sign which followed when He had "left speaking" is a good illustration of the mutual influence of every-day religion and every-day work. Simon had waited on Christ at His preaching, and lent Him his boat for a platform. Jesus will now help Simon at his fishing, and reward him for his sacrifice. To interpret the nature of the deed itself, let us first note that it is done of set purpose and intention on the Lord's part. He insists upon the cast of the net being made when Simon's experience told him that it was hopeless. The result, therefore, was not one merely fortuitous, prodigious, or marvellous, but a miracle, in the proper sense, wrought by the will and purpose of the Lord, for ends which will presently appear. This view is confirmed by Peter's "*Nevertheless, at Thy word,*" etc. The assertion of the future Apostle, "I will do it at Thy bidding," is the point, as Steinmeyer well remarks, on which the effect of the incident hangs. Peter acknowledges that if left to himself and his own will he would not throw the net; his own professional

experience and knowledge would keep him from doing so. Thus he places himself in such a position that Jesus alone must be honoured as the Worker of the result which follows: 'If I do catch anything, this happens not in the natural order of things, or of chance, but comes from Thee.' A shoal of fish is by no means of itself a miraculous occurrence. Everything here turns upon the revelation of a mastery over nature claimed by Jesus. Yet the greatness of the catch was the point of impression according to the narrative. And it is easy to see why. For the end in view, what was needed for these fishermen about to be made Apostles, was an experience in their own calling which should take possession of their imagination as an emblem of the great future which lay before them in their new career as fishers of men.* For this purpose a draught phenomenally large was the thing of moment. It is, therefore, comparatively indifferent to our interpretation *how* Jesus wrought this work; whether by exceptional perception of the movements of the fish, by preternatural knowledge of the place where they were to be found, by calling in prayer for a special providential interference, or by a direct act of power compelling the creatures themselves. Yet as the work, when wrought, irresistibly carried the thoughts of the spectators to the power and glory of the Worker, to the Divine elements in His Person, we classify it as one of the Nature-miracles, a work of Him Who is the Word creative and providential. More particularly we are to note that here we have a Christ-miracle—a work of the God-man—a work revealing His Lordship over nature, and that not so much as omnipotent God, rather as the Head of the human race, the Ideal Man,

* Bruce, *The Miraculous Element, etc.*, p. 231.

to Whom alone the ascriptions of dominion over all creatures (cf. Psalm viii. with Heb. ii. 6-9) fully apply. Man's own commission to rule on earth, to command the tribes of land and air and sea, is fulfilled but imperfectly, with toil and danger. Here is the Second Man, the Lord from heaven, giving proof on this Galilean lake that all things are now put under His feet for His Messianic work. Nor is this central conception of the miracle without its suggestion as to the mode. For it suggests, not external, forcible compulsion of the creature-world, rather an exercise of that same kind of providential control which guides their periodic migrations. It hints at the possession in perfection by The Man of a sympathetic power over animated nature, which in some degree belonged to man unfallen, and of which some faint and wavering image appears now and then in exceptional, poetic human individuals.

3. The EFFECTS or RESULTS of the deed, which also disclose its PURPOSE, were these: a general impression of astonishment, a spiritual crisis in the instance of Peter, and a complete and immediate decision on his part and that of the other Fisher-Apostles.

The astonishment was probably shared by a large circle of spectators, "*All that were with him.*" In this way the act was a seal to that whole neighbourhood of Christ's Divine commission, and a confirmation of the teaching to which so many had just listened. The fisher-folks acquainted with the lake and with that particular pursuit were specially fitted to receive the impression of such a miracle. What direction the impression took further in susceptible minds is brought out by the description of Simon Peter's case. Prepared by previous disclosures to himself and his friends of Jesus' Messianic character (see John i. and ii.), Simon

had this day put himself more entirely into Jesus' hands, in the pointed speech, "Nevertheless at Thy word." When the astounding result followed, it burst upon his already educated perception that the Lord God of Israel was beside him in that boat. The claims of Jesus suddenly rose on Peter's conviction to those of the Highest. He is proved to be both God and Lord. The sequel is according to the law of finest spiritual analogy. Much as such proof of God's nearness and immanence in man is desired by earnest spirits, when it is granted the conviction of Divine nearness instantaneously reacts on their own sense of personal sin and unworthiness; the inmost depth of their heart is stirred —its candour flashes forth; it is not possible that such as they should dwell with or serve Israel's Holy One. "*He fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*" Hereupon comes the immediate "*Fear not*" of Jesus. It is not the bare presence of God before which Peter and his fellows stand. It is rather that God has come to them in the one Mediator between God and man: 'Fear not; I am with thee: peace be unto thee.' Grounded on this redemptive revelation in its Highest Person there shall follow redeemed service. 'Depart from thee! Nay! I will never depart from thee, nor thou from Me. Thy Lord will not let go His hold of thee. He hath taken thee a blessed captive. Henceforth thou shalt catch men.' A sinful man! Yes; it is well. Just such sinful men, come to themselves, most deeply conscious of their sinfulness, the Lord needs to be His messengers. It is the mark of most of them, that at the moment when they have seen the glory of their Lord and got their call to be His ministers, they are then most overcome with a sense of their own

unworthiness. When Moses got that sight of the glory, that revelation of the grace of Jehovah he had so earnestly besought, "he made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped. And he said, If now I have found grace in Thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray Thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people" (Exod. xxxiv. 8, 9). Isaiah's well-known cry of "unclean lips" when he saw the Lord and spake of His glory was followed by his ready, "Here am I; send me" (Isa. vi.). Jeremiah, sanctified from the womb, ordained to be a prophet, when the first call to actual ministry came, replied, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child" (Jer. i. 6). Saul of Tarsus, prostrate on the ground, blinded by the vision of the Lord whom he was persecuting—the proud Pharisee melted in a moment by that sight into childlike humbleness and submission—cries, "Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to do?" (Acts ix. 6). The point of spiritual similarity in all these instances is notable. The Divine is so revealed that the sinful man is smitten to the dust, and the new man, clothed in humility, rises a fit instrument for the Divine service. A real sight of God, a real view of sin, a sense of being dealt with by the Lord Himself Who saves us, girds us, sends us whither He will,—such are the grades of Christ's curriculum for Christian ministry. Those who have been in their own persons notable instances of His saving grace, conscious of their deep indebtedness to that grace—who "love much, being much forgiven"—these are His choice messengers to others. "*Fear not,* Simon; *from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*"

This brings us to what was the crowning purpose of the miracle—to be a sign and seal of the calling of these converts of His as preachers of the Gospel, messengers

of the Kingdom, fishers of men. It is childish criticism to aver that the Synoptics have contradicted one another, or that Luke has contradicted himself (cf. Matt. iv. 18-22; Mark i. 16-20; Luke iv. 38), because the call and decision of the fisher-apostles are so related that we cannot hold this lake-scene to have been the first meeting of Jesus with Peter and his friends, or even the only scene in which the significant words about man-fishing were used. It is evident that these men were prepared by Jesus, for His purpose, not in a single moment, but by varied action and influence of His upon them. They were already believers in Him, friends and disciples of His, prior to this transaction. They had received further hints that He meant to make them special fellow-workers for Him. Now the decisive step was taken; they left their secular calling to be put in training for the apostleship which was to follow. That the condensed narrative should sometimes seem to lose the perspective of these steps and merge them in a single bold picture is easy to understand.* The exquisite propriety of the scene to this call has been often remarked upon. See in this the skill of the Great Fisher. While Peter and his friends were fishing at Jesus' direction, they were caught themselves. He did a miracle which none were so competent to judge and witness as fishers—a miracle which was likely to make the greatest impression upon fishermen, and so He won them—taking them as it were in their own net. So

* "None but those abstractionists who must measure all phenomena, however infinite in variety, upon the Procrustean bed of their own logical formulas, will see in this account the stamp of a legendary story. It has all the freshness of life and reality about it. Whoever is well-read in the history of the diffusion of Christianity in all ages will be able to recall many analogous cases" (Neander, *Life of Christ*, p. 172).

His grace ever works, fitting itself into nature's fitnesses. The wise men of the East, whose business and delight it was to study the heavens, were guided by a star to Bethlehem's Babe. Those who followed Jesus from Capernaum for bread because they saw the loaves multiplied were taught of the bread from heaven. She who came to Sychar's well at noon for water went home with the water of life everlasting springing up in her soul. "So these," says Dr. Donne (quoted by Trench), "who were made glad when they took great store of fish, were taken in that draught and made nobler and higher, but fishers still. Christ makes heaven all things to all men, that He may gain all."

The decision itself is recorded in the closing words of the narrative (ver. 11): "And when they had brought their boats to land, they left all and followed Him" (cf. Matt. iv. 20, 22; Mark i. 18, 20). The characteristic point in this decision is not so much the sacrifice of their all, the forsaking of their trade and their usual home, the entireness of their consecration, as their doing all this at the right moment and out of attachment to the right Man—the chosen Christ of God, Who chooses and calls them. The history of religion is full of incidents of self-denial and asceticism—marvels of abnegation. Many men have left far more than did these four fishermen. But what an illustration is their case of the Master's words elsewhere: "Faithful in a few, thou shalt be ruler over many"! The yielding up of their nets and boats, on the part of these four men, has made its mark on the civilization of the world, on the progress of the race, on the increase of the kingdom of God, second to nothing that has ever happened in the history of mankind, because to them it was given to seize the ripe hour and to

cast in their lot with the Son of man for the world's redemption.

4. The Symbolic Meaning of the incident. We cannot but regard it as an acted parable. We are justified in so regarding it when we note how Jesus used this figure of the Net and Fishes for one of His illustrations of the nature and work of the Kingdom,* and that He doubled this miracle on the same Galilean lake after the Resurrection.† Thus He called these fishermen now for apostolic work, and with this sign renewed He sealed them afresh for it ere He left the world.

The analogies between the work of fishers and the work of Christ's servants are many. Trench, culling from patristic and other ancient sources, has given us some of the more recondite of these. That the fisher takes his prey alive;‡ draws them to him, not drives them from him; draws to one another all he has taken; that his work is one of *art* or *skill*, rather than of force and violence. More obvious are the features of *patience*,—wearing out long nights and many disappointments, and *toil*,—"endure hardness," says Paul to Timothy in a martial metaphor; so here Christ calls His servants to a laborious art. But each Christian worker will probably best make his own commentary, and find out what touches himself in the way Christ will have His servants be "fishers of men." *E.g.*, that the fishers must be first caught themselves, entirely drawn to Jesus and bound to His service; that they must catch others, as

* Matt. xiii. 47.

† John xxi. 4-11.

‡ This suggestion comes indeed from the text itself of the word to Peter: ἀνθρώπους ἔσῃ ζωγρῶν (Luke v. 10). Ζώγρειν is to "take alive." See R.V., *marg.*

He caught them, by touching the conscience, rousing that sense of sin which alone leads to an entire dependence on the Saviour; that a sense of unfitness on the part of those called to spiritual work is the best evidence of fitness; that Christ's servants are to look for great successes. They are not indeed to despise the art and care needed to win some single soul (Jesus Himself sets the example of such), but they are called to be fishers rather than anglers—social and not solitary workers, expecting not a mere occasional capture, but netfuls; that all their success is at His inspiration, and comes most surely when they follow implicitly His bidding; that as boats and nets are needed to catch fish, yet not the nets and boats, but the catch, is that on which fishers set their hearts; so, not means and methods, but results, must occupy the supreme place in the Christian worker's thought,—not attractive services, effective speech, or crowded audience, but immortal souls.*

* Many commentators, especially among the ancients, expound the details of this miracle as prophetic hints of the future progress of the Gospel. For some account of these see "The post-Resurrection Miracle."

III.

THE STILLING OF THE STORM.

Matt. viii. 18-27; Mark iv. 35-41; Luke viii. 22-5.

THIS incident, recorded by all the Synoptics, is placed by Mark and Luke in immediate consecution to the delivery of the parable-discourse most fully recorded in Matt. xiii. And in all three accounts it is immediately followed by the visit to Gadara and the cure of the demoniac there. The combined impression, then, is that it occurred, appropriately enough, shortly after a very definite crisis or turning-point in the Lord's ministry. He was now taking leave of the Pharisees, scribes, and regular attenders on the synagogue-worship, by whom His first advances had been repelled. He was now addressing Himself more to the masses of the people. He preaches to them in the fields, on the highways, by the lake-shore. He has adopted a new style of speech for their benefit. "He spake to them in parables, and without a parable spake He not unto them." Mark tells us how the enthusiasm of the people showed itself now that He had turned more entirely to them. They so crowded the house in Capernaum into which He had retired with the disciples, that there was no leisure left Him and them

to take their customary meals. His relatives became alarmed, and thought it their duty to arrest Him as insane. His mother seconded the efforts of His brethren in the more gentle form of trying to interrupt His discourse and to recall Him into the privacy of their family life.* But Jesus intimated that the Church of His believing followers was now His family and His home, and went on with His work. Then followed, as related in this chapter, similar crowdings by the shore, His securing a boat to wait on Him lest the multitude should throng Him, His retiring into it, and then having to speak from it to the people gathered on the beach. The Evangelist adds that it was at the close of the well-known parable-sermon so preached that He sought the retirement and rest of this voyage to the opposite coast,—"the same day when the even was come." The ship puts off from the shore, followed by a flotilla of boats filled with people trying to accompany his voyage. The disciples took Him with them, "even as He was in the boat," *i.e.*, without His ever leaving it, or without any change of dress, perhaps without any refreshment, glad to get Him away from His incessant labours. Tired out with these, He lay down at once in the stern, and fell fast asleep on the cushion.† A sudden squall arose, such as oft happens in an inland lake among mountains. "A great storm of wind," as it is called. Waves beat into the ship. "They were filled with water, and were in jeopardy." But Jesus slept calmly on. Why did He sleep? Just because

* Mark iii. 20, 31. Cf. Matt. xii. 46-50; Luke viii. 19-21.

† As προσκεφάλειον may mean a support or prop of any kind, some hold that no other pillow is meant than the bench or bulwark, the wooden back of the πρύμνη itself. Steinmeyer prefers to think of a soft cushion, because of the Septuagint use of the word in Ezek. xiii. 18.

He was weary. Let us avoid the absurdities of those commentators who go about to render a special reason. "He slept to try their faith!" or even, as good Matthew Henry, "He slept to *show* that He was man!" He slept because He was human, because His human life was real, and not merely played or acted. He ate when He was an hungered and food was to be had. When thirsty He asked for a draught of water. When His friends were grieved He wept along with them, and when there was cause for gladness He rejoiced in spirit. So here He slept because He was tired.

But in such a storm, why should He sleep? Why, just because He was not only true man, but man of true faith—because He had perfect trust in His heavenly Father's arm. Some of His saints have shown true faith and heroism in like case. See David lying down to rest ringed round with cruel foes: "I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for God sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about" (Psalm iii.). See Peter, whom bloody Herod has imprisoned and may bring forth at any moment for death, lying fast asleep in his dungeon till the angel of deliverance wakes him (Acts xii. 6). Or see yon noble Scottish martyr, with sentence of death about to be put in execution, slumbering peacefully within a few hours of his doom. And shall not the King of saints and Prince of believers manifest in the highest degree a sublime and simple confidence in God? There it is. Jesus fast asleep amid the dashing waves and drenching storm. But was the danger real? Yes; to human eyes very real. To these fishermen, who had known that water all their days, it was real, and they were afraid for themselves and Him. It was very natural, this fear, though foolish. Natural

that they should dread the idea of all their hopes and prospects being lost in this premature grave, yet foolish that they should fear for themselves and Him so meaningless an end. The Roman general called to his frightened boatman in a similar case, "Fear not, you carry Cæsar and all his fortunes." But these fisher-disciples might have said to themselves, "Let us never be afraid, we carry Christ and His kingdom." Yet nature got the upper hand of faith, and they gave way to their headlong terrors.

They had abstained for a while from disturbing Him, but now they could do so no longer. They crowded round Him. They awoke Him. They cried, "*Lord, save us, we perish! Master, carest Thou not that we perish? Master, master, we perish!*" Though unmoved by the piercing shrieks of the wind and the hoarse menace of the waves, He wakes at the first cry of the disciples. He arose calmly, composedly. The Son of man had been sleeping. The Son of God awakes and speaks. For Himself exhausted, for others still mighty. He looked down at the waves, He looked up into the heavens. *He rebuked the wind and said unto the sea, Peace! be still!* The *wind ceased,* the raging of the water was at an end—*and there was a great calm.* What a revelation of God in man! It is not so much the mere Power that impresses. We have seen Him do as great works before, and greater. But, as the wondering disciples said to the other crews and their clinging passengers, 'it is the manner of the man!' In what condition is man by himself more thoroughly helpless than in a storm at sea—in a frail boat—the sport of the elements—a mere straw upon the waters, with death opening all her mouths upon him? In no condition, unless you add that in which

Jesus was a few moments before—fast asleep. A waking man in a shipwreck may be on the watch for some means of escape. But a man asleep in a boat rapidly filling with water and on the point of going down!—such and so helpless did Jesus seem the one moment; and the next! He stands and speaks to the elements, and they hear with the facility and readiness of well-trained servants. "*What manner of man is this! for He commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey Him.*"

The word *rebuke* in this description is a very suggestive one. Is this simply figurative language and poetic style? or is it like that in another place: "He rebuked the fever, and it left her"? Are we to conclude that the disturbances of nature are of hostile operation, that all physical evils, alike in nature and in man, are among those works of the devil which according to Scripture the Christ was manifested to destroy? It may be a more accurate position if we say that through the sin of man all these had their entrance into the world; that storms and earthquakes, pestilences and famines, calamities and disasters, as overtaking *man* from the side of nature, are part of that confusion and disorder which sin has brought into God's creation. And in this light His word of rebuke has a great and blessed meaning. It shows that the Maker is now come to be the Healer of the world. Even amid the physical ills that prey upon us—"when storms are sudden and waters deep"—we have this act of power to comfort us: "He rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm." This Redeemer and Restorer is none other than the Great Creator. As such He is clothed with the same mighty power. As easily and as effectually as He said, Let light be, and light was,

can He say to the darkness which has come by sin, Be dispelled! be gone! As easily as He commanded and it stood fast at the first, shall He say to the troubled tempest of this world's ills and sorrows, when His time has come, *Peace! be still!* *

But He had His own disciples to rebuke and correct as well as the storm to still. Some say that this came first. It is recorded in that order certainly in Matthew's Gospel: first the disciples corrected, and then the storm calmed. In that case the very order of the events is a fresh tribute to His glory. He was so collected, so certain of His power, He thought so little of the danger, that He first, after He was awoke, chode and corrected the disciples for their want of faith before He proceeded to remove the cause of their fear. However this may be, the reproof to the disciples is very instructive. "*Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?*" This probably before stilling the storm. Then after it: "*Where is your faith? How is it that ye have no faith?*" These questions do not imply that they were absolutely faithless. This could not be. Their instinctive application to Him when things became so bad, the words with which they awoke Him, "*Master, save us!*"—these show clearly enough their belief that He could and would deliver Himself and them from the danger. But He reproves them for the littleness, the narrowness of their faith, for the want of larger trust. They ought to have had such confidence in Him as to believe that sleeping

* "In the Greek, each of His commands is given by a single verb in the imperative mood. To the winds He said, Σιώπα, 'Be at peace.' And to the waves, Πεφίμωσο, 'Be still.' . . . There is a simple Divine dignity in the words which irresistibly reminds us of the creative command, *Yehi 'ōr*, 'Let there be light;' or the healing command, *Ephphatha*, 'Be opened.' His style reveals Him. It is the Lord of Nature Who speaks" (see Cox, *Expositor's Note-book*, p. 321).

or waking made no difference to Him, that the boat which carried Him and them together could not be overwhelmed. It was not that they had no faith; but—like one who has a piece, though in sudden panic he forgets to fire—it was as bad as if they had had none. They failed to apply their faith fully. It was not ready for use. They believed Jesus to be the Christ, they had left all to follow Him, and had they been consistent with their own belief they had showed no such unworthy fear. But Fear for the moment ruled, and not Faith. Thus they became as weak as we all are when our faith is not at hand in the time of need; thus they justly incurred the rebuke: Where is your faith? How is it that ye have no faith?

This touching lesson—Fear paralyzing Faith; Jesus rebuking Unbelief and putting Fear to flight; Faith the conquering opposite of Fear—these things come home to all Christians. How like is unbelief in every age—alike foolish and unreasonable. We think, perhaps, had we been with Jesus in that ship we should never have been disturbed. And yet how certain it is that their failure in faith is just that which we perpetually make ourselves! These disciples believed in their Master's power and glory. They had entrusted to Him their souls, their lives, their all; and yet they forgot all this in a moment of panic, of mere natural, human fear. How exactly like us and our unbelief! For unbelief is always the same confused, feeble, sinful thing. You have received Christ for your Saviour; you have long ago known His great salvation; and yet let any sudden squall arise, and you fear and cry out as if all were lost You grow downcast when days are dark and friends are few. You are unstrung when some sudden trial

crushes your home. Your knees fail and your hands hang down. Believers, why is this? Why should it be? Where is your faith? Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God; believe also in Jesus. You believe in His *Almightiness*, as the Christ of God, to Whom all things in providence are entrusted for His people's sake. Is there anything in your lot or life *He* cannot master, Whom the winds and waves obey? You believe in His *Wisdom*. Are not your times in His hand? And your times of storm and terror you have found before to be His times of help and healing. You believe in His *Love;* and His love is never more active toward you than in the tempest of trial. You believe in His *Faithfulness*,—that His promise stands sure, "I will never leave thee, nor never, never forsake thee."

We are all voyagers on the sea of life, and we shall not get across, any of us, without storms. Some of us may have very much less of these than others. Some sailors get easy winds, and sunny days, and prosperous voyages, and happy escapes. Others are always unfortunate, as they say. They are becalmed, or overladen, or badly manned, or ill-piloted. Almost every voyage is a mishap; and they tumble and scramble through their life, beggared and shipwrecked at every turn. But the weather of this voyage or its chance is a secondary question. Let the first question be, Is Christ with us in the ship? It matters little how calm and smiling the sea at the outset if He be not with us. Most of us, in youth, flatter ourselves that the voyage will be easy and prosperous. These treacherous waters may soon tell another tale. Yet, if He be with you and in you, it matters little how the waters rage. Only have faith in Him, and you shall see how the danger

will flee before you. That which seemed insurmountable will part asunder and make a way for you. Billows that threatened to engulf you will bend their willing backs to bear you on. Winds that beat and blustered once so contrary will waft you to the desired haven, till, some bright morning, the sails shall be furled and the anchors dropped in the Harbour of Eternal Rest.

The effect of this miracle on the minds of the beholders was great. "*The men marvelled;*" "*They feared exceedingly;*" "*They, being afraid, wondered,* saying one to another, *What manner of man is this?*" None of these men, from the disciples to the most casual passenger, could be ignorant of the mighty works which Jesus had been doing. But this one seemed to throw the others into the shade; for it seemed to throw a more direct light on the mystery of Who and Whence He was. Prophets and servants of the Lord had in former times dealt with disease, with suffering, and even death, and overcome it in the name of the Lord. But this simple mastery of nature on the part of man, this speaking to the winds and waves as if they were His faithful hounds which crept quietly behind Him at a word—this stirred at least an awed curiosity, if it did not suggest a marvellous explanation. "Who hath gathered the wind in His fists? Who hath bound the waters in a garment? Who hath established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if thou canst tell?"

There can be no doubt as to the class of our Lord's wonders to which this one belongs. It is a miracle wrought upon nature, but of the providential order. Like that of the Draught of Fishes, it teaches that to Christ, as God-Man, Mediator, has been committed

all power, as over all things, so over the physical universe. Its distinctive teaching may be summed up in these two items : (1) Directly, it teaches that to Him as Lord of providence belongs all power to defend His cause and people from danger, and that He is continually exercising that power which on special and signal occasions has called out not only the fervent adoration of His own, but has attracted the wonder and admiration of the world ; (2) Less directly, but very significantly, the story suggests the perpetual presence of Christ in and with His Church, for its protection and deliverance. In this scene Jesus was training His disciples to recognise not only His God-manhood, but His spiritual oneness with His people and cause. He was training them to reckon upon His power and presence when these should no longer appeal to the senses. They were to see Him always in the ship. His bodily sleep or His bodily absence was to make no real difference. His cause can never founder or be wrecked, for He is ever with it. His Church is a sacred ark tossed to and fro on the heaving waters of time, beaten from its course by many storms, swept by many waves, all but wrecked often, not so much by rocks and shoals external to it, as by the "mutinies, contentions, confusions, and groundless panics of its own crew." Yet though at such times Christ may appear to be asleep, to be absent from His Church altogether, He is in point of fact always ready, and will come at His people's prayer. How strikingly has this been exemplified throughout the long history of the Church ! The resuscitative power of Christianity, so impressive even to the eye of the historian, means to the Christian far more : it means the perpetual indwelling of the Christ. During seasons of persecution, or when the cold waves

of deism, rationalism, and infidelity swept over the Church, how often did the Christian religion seem on the point of being extinguished! But as oft has the hidden Christ within arisen, the victorious power of resistance been imparted, and the danger has passed away.*

This narrative raises in a very direct way a question which underlies all the miracle-histories, viz., the relation of the miracle-working power to the constitution of our Lord's Person, and more especially to the conditions of the *status humilis*. Does He work His wonders in virtue of a power or faculty residing in Himself, upon which at any moment He can draw by a simple act of will? Or were they all wrought by specific acts of faith and prayer to His Father, and each of them instances of an unction of the Holy Ghost which might be expressed in the phrase, "for God was with Him"? (Acts x. 38.) The answer to this question by no means involves us in any discussion of the Lord's Divinity. Opposite views upon it are held by men equally believing in His real Godhead. But those who incline to the *Kenotic* view of the *status humilis*, who desire to maintain the likeness of Jesus in *all* things to His brethren, and that therefore He must always have worked and walked by faith, prefer the latter answer. The former

* This thought has been vigorously worked out by Canon Liddon: "Christianity contains within itself the secret of its perpetual youth, of its indestructible vitality. . . . Amid the storms of hostile prejudice and passion, in presence of political vicissitudes, or of intellectual onslaughts, or of moral rebellion and decay, an unreal Saviour must be found out. A Christ upon paper, though it were the sacred pages of the Gospel, would have been as powerless to save Christendom as a Christ in fresco. A living Christ is the key to the phenomenon of Christian history" (*University Sermons*, Second Series, Sermon IX.: Rivingtons, 1879).

is thought to "harmonize best with that idea of His Person according to which He is to all intents and purposes God upon earth." It is hardly possible to settle the question by mere exegesis. A large array of passages, our present text among them, plainly favour the idea of a resident indwelling power on which He draws at will. Other passages, not so numerous, yet clearly enough suggest the idea of a power not indwelling, but transcendent, called into play by the prayers and faith of Jesus (*e.g.*, Luke xi. 20; Mark vii. 34; John xi. 41; Luke xviii. 43; Matt. xv. 31). We must conclude that the two ways of regarding these works as wrought by faith and yet wrought by an indwelling power are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually complementary.

Beyschlag's remark here is very much to the point.* The Temptation-narrative throws light upon their mutual relation. The appeals made to Jesus by the Tempter presuppose that He could in His own strength do supernatural things. These appeals failed because they blindly overlooked His unbending principle to will no miracle without an understanding with His Father. This suggests the real solution. The miracle-power of Jesus belongs to Him not as the Second Person of the Godhead in a human mask; but as the Second Adam, the head and representative of the New Humanity. To Him belongs supremely such dominion over nature as unfallen man may have in some measure possessed, such as man redeemed and glorified yet may show. To Him belongs the power and right to grapple with disease and death, because He is manifested to destroy the works of the devil. Yet, on earth, He was not the Son of

* *Das Leben Jesu*, 2te Auf., i., p. 297.

man in glory ;—during the *status humilis* this inherent gift and right of the Theanthropic Person was held in strict subordination to His then present Messianic task, in constant correspondence with the will of the Heavenly Father Whose work He had come to fulfil.

IV.

THE MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES.

MATT. xiv. 13-21 ; MARK vi. 30-44 ; LUKE ix. 10-17 ; JOHN vi. 1-14.

IF we had been allowed to ask one of those who lived in the days of the Gospel-history, one who was an eye-witness of the works of Jesus, which of all His miracles was the greatest, or at least made the greatest impression in its time, he would no doubt have replied, "*The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes.*" And the reasons why it should have been so accounted are plain ; for while the *Raising of Lazarus*, for example, was as much or more obviously Divine, yet when we consider the direct Divine power implied in this act, so like Him "Who satisfieth everything that lives," as well as the multitude of witnesses before whom it was wrought, and who were themselves immediate partakers of the benefit, we can see how it has attained to such a place in the record—being recounted by every one of the four Evangelists, with all the details exactly corresponding. We thus see how it has broken the teeth of the Rationalists to explain it away ; and how, indeed, it marked a sort of crisis in the Redeemer's personal ministry, causing as it did a separating and sifting

of true believers in Jesus from the unbelieving world.*

It happened at a time when Jesus wished to retire with the Twelve from the busy western shores of the Sea of Galilee, and struck across the lake in a boat towards the north-eastern district, which was partly desert, or at least much less frequented, and to which He had been wont to repair for quiet. But the retirement He sought was not that day obtained. The people saw Him departing. They knew His course. They ran afoot, *i.e.* by land, round the north end of the lake. Boats for them were out of the question. They were too numerous. It was Passover time. Thousands of strangers from other parts of Galilee were on their way to the capital, and were anxious for this opportunity of seeing Jesus. Led on by those acquainted with His route and habits, they were conducted to the very spot, and so eagerly and promptly that when Jesus 'went forth" at the quiet, lonely spot He aimed at, He found the ground pre-occupied by a vast congre-

* Even Keim admits that it is the greatest and best-attested of the Nature-miracles. It is in vain that attempts are made, once more, to reduce it from the rank of these by what is practically the rationalistic hypothesis of Paulus, viz., that Jesus began with the handful before Him, trusting the providence of God and the laws of human nature for the rest, and that His generous confidence awoke the sympathies of the people to bring out of their stores all they had. Weiss revives this with unusual caution and reverence. He is sure "that the intention of all the four accounts is to describe a miracle," that "a miracle of Divine providence at least must be assumed." He would not even interdict (!) simple faith from keeping to the idea of a creative miracle (ii. 385-6: Clark, 1883). Beyschlag, in his terser way, puts it as an act of "heroic trust in God" on Jesus' part (i. 320). It would be a waste of time and worse to go over the arguments in reply. It is simply impossible that the disciples and the people could have put the construction upon the whole events which they did, if the provision came after all out of the wallets of the multitude themselves.

gation. Nothing disappointed, the unwearied Saviour began afresh,—spoke all day long, healed diseases, until the day began to wear to a close, and then a practical difficulty presented itself to the Saviour's mind.* In the hurry of their unpremeditated chase the people had brought little or no provision. It was late; the towns and villages lay some miles off. They had wanted food all day. Nature now required sustenance. How was it to be obtained? In a few words He made the need plain to the disciples. They said it would be impossible to convey food at once from a distance for such a multitude. They called for their store at His bidding, and found only a trifle left. Then, when He had thus thoroughly aroused the attention of the disciples, made them take unforgetable note what the provision on hand exactly amounted to, and had excited their expectation as to what He would do, He proceeded. "*Bring them hither to Me.*" And the lad came with his humble store. "*Five loaves*" or "*cakes*" of the coarsest kind of bread, and "*two small fishes*"—a mere morsel of the plainest relish for the bread. The Master took it, placed it before Him, Himself evidently on some elevated place on the hillside, making that the head of His table. "*Now,*" He said, "*let the people sit down to meat.*" It was a pleasant enough dining-room. Green grass to sit on, and plenty of it. In the calm and cool of the evening, welcome to rest on after the hard running of the morning and the standing pressed and packed together through the day to get within sound of the Preacher's voice. Now they dispersed themselves over the ground in companies or groups, like parterres or plots of

* So St. John, who makes Him anticipate what the Synoptics describe the disciples as initiating.

garden flowers.* "By hundreds and by fifties," says Mark. Twenty groups of two hundred and fifty each would give exactly the five thousand of the narrative. Matthew no doubt adds "women and children." But these were perhaps seated apart, according to Eastern manners; at all events, they were not numerous, for it was a crowd of Passover pilgrims, who were mostly males.

To return. The people are all seated, tired and hungry, ready to begin; but there is nothing before them. Any little store some of them had is long since exhausted. The Twelve stand by, empty-handed, wondering, waiting. Then in sight of all the people Jesus took that mere handful, held it up before God, blessed, brake, and gave it to His disciples. Ever as He broke it, He had enough to fill the hands of each of the Twelve, as full as His own were at the first. Each Apostle, as he went to the head of a company and gave away an armful, found that he had as much remaining for the head of the next company; and each of the eaters down the ranks, as he took the handful from his next neighbour and filled his own lap to eat from, found that he had as much left to hand to his next neighbour again. Thus the happy, wondrous meal went on, until, when the whole multitude had finished eating, the Master rose again in His place and said to the disciples, "Gather up the fragments," and the remainder was grown to such plenty that it filled twelve baskets,† such as Jews were wont to carry with them on their journeys.

There is much that is characteristic and significant in the minor details of this miracle—the orderly disposal of the people, the regular distribution of the food, the command about the overplus. These suggest to

* Πρασιαὶ, πρασιαὶ is the Evangelist's expression, which may refer to the bright colours of Eastern dresses.

† Κοφίνοι.

us that, like all His realms of nature and providence, His spiritual kingdom is under law; that there is nothing too small to be taken pains with and done well in His service. "Let all things be done decently and in order; for He is not the Author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." The main design of this notice about the fragments, however, was to confirm the fact of the miracle, to put it on record in every memory, so that He might appeal to it, as He did in subsequent conversation. The immediate effect of this wonder was very great. It crowned the series of mighty works wrought at this stage of His ministry. The people followed Him again in greater crowds than before. They would have carried Him straight off on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem and proclaimed Him there King of Israel. The days of Moses were come back again. He could feed thousands of the people with miraculous food as their Great Lawgiver had done. This must be the Prophet like unto Moses. "*This is of a truth that Prophet which should come into the world.*" How strange and fickle a thing is the human heart! Two days afterwards they forsook Him almost to a man, because He preached to them the spiritual doctrine of His Person and His Cross. To make Him King in Jerusalem was one thing; to throne Him in their hearts and lives was quite another. When He spoke of giving His flesh for the life of the world, and of the mystic eating of that flesh as the sole way to life eternal, their enthusiasm vanished in a day. They strove among themselves and murmured at Him; and even of His former followers many went back and walked no more with Him.

It has been forcibly pointed out * that we have really

* By Weiss, Bruce, and others.

no sufficient reason for this great act unless we assume that in the intention of Jesus it was a symbolic, didactic, and decisive miracle. It was meant both to teach and to test. It supplied a text for the searching discourse which followed shortly after in the synagogue at Capernaum. It applied a touchstone to the enthusiasm of the multitude. "You must not follow Me," He said, "to eat of the loaves. The meat which I give, which I am, is that which is spiritual and endureth to life eternal." To expound this testing application of the miracle in full would mean a complete commentary on the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel; for this discourse was itself the application. The theme is, Christ's Person and Work as the Life of Men. The resulting crisis is also there clearly described. And as then, so still, the sifting, discriminating elements in Christianity are the Incarnation and the Sacrifice of the Son of God. The unbelieving world still stumbles over these. Those who cordially accept them are no longer "of the world."

Let us turn to some of the teaching aspects of this miracle.

Its most obvious inference is one which it yields in common with several of the Nature-miracles, presenting, as they all do, the Lordship over nature and providence which belongs to Jesus as Head of the spiritual kingdom. The followers of Christ are here taught that when engaged in the work of the kingdom they are to have no anxiety about the supply of their bodily wants. It was an acted commentary on that elementary principle in His teaching, 'Seek and serve the kingdom of God, and its King will take care of your earthly and bodily provisions.' He Himself makes precisely this application of the incident on a subse-

quent occasion, when the disciples supposed one of His sayings to reflect on their insufficient supply of food. "Do ye not remember when I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up?" (Mark viii. 14-19.) As if He would say, 'About such matters as bread trouble not yourselves in My service, but depend upon My Father's providence and Mine.' *

A less obvious inference, but one which invites expansion, is its symbolic bearing on the spiritual provision of the kingdom and the mode of its distribution to mankind. The event took place at a time when the disciples had made their first trial of preaching the word of the kingdom. They were anxious about the result. In the most instructive and comforting way this feeding of the multitude showed, and was meant to show, how the Living Word, Christ, in the preached word, the Gospel, becomes the Bread of Life to a perishing world. We cannot be wrong in so interpreting an event from which the Lord Himself drew His discourse on the Heavenly Bread. This, the central thought, we take for granted, viz., that it is Christ Himself Who is the Bread from Heaven, the Heart of Scripture, the Life of Preaching, the All in All of Hearing, Believing, and Experience: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Let us look at what the narrative suggests as to the way in which the Gospel of Christ becomes thus effectual. The significant points in the action of that day were the

* Steinmeyer would have this to be the main if not the only meaning of both the miraculous feedings. "We ought to consider these (two) miracles as prophecies of the future dominion of the kingdom; for there it really did rule, where those who sought it had all the wants that arose in connection with their holy work miraculously supplied" (*The Miracles of our Lord, etc.*, p. 258).

provision accepted from the disciples, the blessing of it by Jesus, and the distribution of it among the people. Each of these has its lesson to carry.

1. "*Give ye them to eat.*" The provision made by the Twelve,—the five loaves and two fishes. For what immediate purpose the Lord made the demand, "How many loaves have ye? Go and see," has been already hinted. It was to clinch the fact. He first put it thoroughly on record that natural means had failed, and thus prepared for the reception of the supernatural. But this incident of the loaves sought and accepted at the hands of men has another meaning. It has a significance in the spiritual or parabolic sense. Doubtless the Lord could have fed the people without the loaves. He could have made bread out of stones, or grass, out of anything or nothing. But He chose with a Divine significance to ask from the Twelve what they had. With that He began. Upon that as a basis He wrought this marvellous work. That is to say, in this work, supernal though it was, the servants had a part assigned them. They had to prepare the means, to do their part, to do their best. It was very little and very poor, but it was their utmost, and the Master gave it the blessing.

Has not this a meaning for us in the service of His Gospel? We are to do our best, humanly speaking, for His cause. We are not to shield our indolence or selfishness under the plea that His cause is supernatural and almighty, that its real power lies above and beyond the means, and can even succeed without them. 'Tis true that Christ and His Gospel can do without us. Its success rests at bottom upon nothing in us. It depends not really upon any man's study or efforts, contributions or sacrifices. It needs us not; but surely

it deserves of us the best we can present. And in another sense it does need us. This is the Lord's way. He will reach men's hearts by man's ministry, and build His Church on the love and devotion of countless human souls. The Master desires and demands of His servants that they "Go and see" to the utmost of their providing, that He may bless it and satisfy His folk with His goodness. It may be a poor handful of barley cakes when all is done, so far as it is ours; but He can make it the life of thousands.

"Give YE them to eat," and the astonished disciples are ready to cry, "Ah, Lord! but what have we to give so many?" This is His secret. What He tells us to do He puts us in a position to do. He asks us to do more for Him than WE CAN in order to show us how easy it is when we rest it on Himself. By commanding us to feed them He gives the pledge that His servants, hearkening to His voice, shall have wherewithal to feed His people. "I will abundantly bless her provision, and will satisfy her poor with bread."

2. "*Bring them hither to Me.*" *The blessing of Jesus* was that which converted a handful of provision into a plenteous feast. Need it be said that it is ever so with the Gospel. The servant, the worker, the preacher, does his best, if he is earnest; and then, if he is wise, he counts it nothing and less than nothing without the Master's blessing. The most elaborate human effort is utterly useless and powerless in Divine things, simply as human effort. Eminently does this apply to the labour of the Gospel ministry. If we were asked to select from literature the *acmé* of effort in that kind, we should without hesitation fix upon the Court-preaching of Louis XIV.'s time in France. In that depraved Court, amid intense profession of religion, there were such

preachers (Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Massillon) as have never since the days of the Apostles been surpassed for impassioned vehemence and power of oratory. The preachers were pious, evangelical, intensely in earnest. Admiring crowds gathered round them. The result in France, in Paris, in those royal and noble circles, was nothing. It was perhaps the most useless and ineffectual preaching that ever dropped from human lips.

On the other hand, how often has the Master blessed most largely and sovereignly the plain efforts of plain, humble, and earnest men! How often has He been pleased to use of the labours of his trained and accomplished workers even those parts that were to themselves the least pleasing, or comfortable! It is a necessary balance to that other necessity for our utmost and conscientious all. In this labour (as in most) *success* is skill—*the* success of turning many to righteousness. He that "winneth souls" is the "wise" worker. And doubtless those who aim at this persistently, painstakingly, will win and wear the crown. But for us all, both that speak and hear, the prime requisite is to comply with the injunction of our Lord about the loaves: "*Bring them hither to Me.*" Let us get our spiritual provision passed under the Master's blessing hand. Let us neither give nor take what has not first gone round by the head of the table. If all our utterances only went from the study to the pulpit, to the classroom, to the teacher's desk by way of the mercy-throne, and then came from us to the pew through another cloud of the incense of the hearers' prayers, we should doubtless have Pentecostal days of the Gospel's power.

For Christ blesses all the real bread that is brought to Him. Human effort or pains about it He will

honour at His gracious will. The word itself He is bound to bless by His unfailing promise. We sometimes misstate this glorious truth of Divine influence. It is too often so put as to be a practical depreciation of the means of grace. As if the word, the thing spoken and heard, were nothing in itself; as if no good were to be expected from the use of it; or, at least, as if all good to be had from it were suspended upon a perchance or a possibility, upon the accompaniment of a capricious and mysterious power. This is nothing else than unbelief, and that of the most vile and mischievous kind, because it borrows the form of orthodox devoutness. If there be a truth made plain to the faith of Christians, it is that so oft as we ask of the Father in Jesus' name what is according to His will, we have the things that we ask. As oft as I take this living bread—these words that are spirit and life—and ask His blessing with them, I have that blessing. As oft as you receive His word in simple reliance on His presence, you have that presence. He honours His own provision and keeps His promise. "It shall not return unto Him void." The particular preacher or the individual hearer may lose the blessing through his own unbelief. Yet "if we believe not, He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself." The feast will infallibly and invariably satisfy where the Lord and His people meet.

3. The Distribution of the Food. "*He blessed and brake the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them.*" It was through the blessing the miracle was wrought, but it was in the breaking and parting of the bread that it was realized. For a miracle it was, and no prodigy. No mountains of bread were seen growing up under the Saviour's hands. In His hands there saw nothing seen but five barley cakes and two

small fishes. In the Apostles' hands there were just the broken portions of the same; and in every eater's hands there were just enough for himself and to spare for his neighbour. No one saw a prodigy, but all felt and enjoyed a miracle in this bread as they parted it and used it.

So is it with the Gospel. It is in the distribution of the word of life, in the breaking of it down, in the turning it over, in the sharing and the spreading of it, that the benefit is realized. It is quite possible to make a fetich of pulpit or Bible; possible to talk as if the Scriptures were God, as if from preaching streamed forth some magical or mesmeric power. Power there is in the Bible; it differs divinely from all other books. Power there is in the Gospel preached; it differs infinitely from speech on any other theme. But the power is in the theme, and it is only realized in the practical and diffusive use of it. "The Word of God is quick and powerful," "living and active," *i.e.*, living and life-giving: living in itself, life-giving only in its distribution.

Grains of corn laid up in the granary will long retain their vital force, though it is only when planted in the soil that they germinate and reproduce. The best science tells us, however, that no cereal seed has a trustworthy record of vitality for more than a hundred years. But the Word of the Lord is "an incorruptible seed." It liveth and endureth for ever. In creeds and confessions, in printed books, in written discourses it is always living, even when buried alive; but it is only as it is planted out, broken down, turned over, spoken about from living hearts, by living lips, from faith to faith, that it becomes, by the grace of its Author, powerful, life-giving, and free.

It is one of the best features of Christian work in our day that, while the preaching of the Gospel through the usual channels is useful and relished as ever, considerable reinforcement has come to aid, a large contingent of Christian volunteers is added to the "army of ordained preachers." How many in our time are brought to Christ by the work of the lay evangelist, or by the faithful dealing of private friends and neighbours. Thus is the Living Bread passed along the ranks by the eaters themselves, and not only by those who minister to them. There may be a note of warning for the Christian Church in such facts, as well as a token for good. It may mean that the usual agencies are too narrow, too apathetic, too inflexible, too little adapted to the wants of the masses. It is for the Church of Christ to arouse herself to the facts, to recognise and welcome all such work, to bring it into harmony with her own God-commissioned, Christ-entrusted functions, to utilize and unify this spontaneous and untrammeled help which her Lord is raising up for her in "His compassion for the multitudes" when "they are as sheep not having a shepherd."

V.

WALKING UPON THE WATER.

MATT. xiv. 22-33 ; MARK vi. 45-52 ; JOHN vi. 15-21.

THE close connection of this incident with that of the first miraculous feeding stands forth on the face of all the narratives. The contrast of the two scenes is no less marked. That work was done in the light of day, in a public concourse, before more than five thousand people ; this on a stormy lake, at night, in presence of a handful of frightened men in a boat. Yet the spirit of the work, how exactly the same simple and loving mind of Jesus. Neither was an argumentative presentation of signs to convince the doubter. Each was the gracious intervention appropriate to the relief of distress. Both are radiant, for those who look into them, with redemption glory.

1. JESUS ALONE. It was late in the afternoon that He had fed the multitudes with the miraculous bread. His first work then at the close of the miracle was to cause the disciples to take ship immediately and cross again to the western shore, towards Bethsaida and Capernaum. It seems that He had some difficulty. He had to "constrain" them. Perhaps they, too, were carried away by the frenzy of the time, and would have joined the people in proclaiming Him king ; or

perhaps they were unwilling to leave Him behind among the people at a moment of such excitement. So soon as the disciples were off in their boat, He dismissed the people. They had quietly dispersed, the more that they saw Jesus remaining behind, for they no doubt expected to find Him easily in the morning.

His object thus gained, "*He went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come He was there alone.*" That is to say, the first evening or afternoon had passed into the second evening or night-fall; twilight deepened into dark, dark into midnight, midnight passed and the chill morning hours, and still He was there, alone, praying. We have here "Jesus as our example in prayer;" not only praying with and for others, but actually a suppliant by Himself, and such a suppliant! An example of solitary prayer—He had no closet, but a "mountain apart." An example of continued prayer—He had been so busy all day that the night must be drawn upon, and the whole night: He only ceased towards the dawn. An example of special prayer—that is, of a special season devoted to it beyond the common. Of this several instances are recorded; such as (Mark i.) after the first Sabbath's work in Capernaum, and again (Luke vi. 12) just before the choosing of the Apostles, on which occasion He continued all night in prayer to God, and when it was day proceeded to the calling of the Twelve. So here He gave a night to prayer after the first mission of the Apostles and at what we may call the crisis of His Galilean ministry. Observe especially this last note of connection. John expressly records that Jesus departed that evening into the mountain alone, because He perceived that the people would come and take

Him by force, to make Him a king. He probably passed, that night, through one of those inward experiences which, as recorded in other instances of Him, were followed by significant public acts and words. He "perceived" the ease with which He could then have founded a great party in the Jewish nation, an outward and visible following far more powerful, to human appearance, than that which He did finally leave on earth. But the decision wrought out in that night's prayer appeared the very next day. He went straight, when He had crossed to the other side, and preached in the synagogue of Capernaum, as John records it, such a sermon that almost all but the Twelve left Him, and many disciples went back and walked no more with Him. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth," He said; "the flesh profiteth nothing." And He had to found His kingdom not on the glory of the flesh, which "falleth away," but on the power of the Spirit in that word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.

2. THE DISCIPLES ALONE. Jesus had given instructions to the Twelve to make straight for the other shore. He had left them in ignorance how He Himself was to cross, or whether He was to come at all that night. They endeavoured to carry out His instructions, but soon the wind rose. It was against them. It blew a hurricane. Their sails had to be taken down. They betook themselves to the oars, and made but slow progress; for by the fourth watch of the night—that is, about three or four o'clock—they had only made out some three miles. While they were thus in the ship, in the midst of the lake, tossed with waves, He was "alone on the land" (Mark vi. 47). As the storm rose and grew dangerous, doubtless they thought of that other day, not so long before, when

they were in peril on the same waters, and had Jesus on board asleep, and went and roused Him to save them. Was not this one of His reasons for sending them away by themselves in a night of storm, viz., that they might learn to trust an absent as well as a present Master; that from the slighter trial of trusting a sleeping Saviour with them in the ship they might be trained to the greater faith of trusting a Saviour distant on the land, and so be trained to live altogether by faith and not by sight. He leads them to it by degrees, as an eagle teaches her young to fly.

Another stroke of Mark's description, too, should be noted. Ver. 48: "*And He saw them toiling in rowing.*" From the mountain side, from His place of prayer, He saw them. His mind reverted to their case. His eye rested on them in the darkness. To Him that struggling speck among the waters was not invisible; and as He saw them He thought of them and hasted to their aid. The situation is most suggestive. They are in the ship amid the waves; He stands high upon the shore and views them from afar. They are labouring at the oar; He is praying on the mount. They in the dark and tempest make little way, and see not Him and seem parted from Him; but He has His eye upon them and His heart with them all the while, and at the right moment and in a way peculiarly His own He comes to their relief. In this way—by proving the real communication between Him and them, when apparently parted by time, space, and circumstances on earth—He was training their faith to hold fast His presence when He should be on earth with them no more. Is it not most instructive to us? We are still in the ship, and sometimes storms will rise. But let us reflect. The ship is His; it cannot sink. Sometimes

the winds are contrary, but they, too, are under His control. Above all, while we are at sea He is on the heavenly shore; while we toil He prays; while we are in darkness He sees us; His eyes never fail to rest on us; He slumbers not nor sleeps. And then He can and does come to our help in ways so surprising to men, so effectual for His cause, so glorifying to Himself, that all are constrained to cry, "Of a truth this is the Son of God."

3. JESUS COMES TO THEM WALKING ON THE WATER. He had been absorbed in prayer. The night was far spent. The storm was very great. It was necessary that He should rejoin them. If we suppose, with some, that our Lord's original instruction was for them to beat about the shore where they left Him till He should be ready, and that the wind blowing from this shore drove them in spite of their efforts towards the southern end of the lake, the necessity that He should go to them, seeing they could not come to Him, grows plainer. He came after them, through the darkness, by a mode of progression unknown to men, and only on this occasion, so far as we know, used by Him,—"*walking upon the sea.*" This, when we define its place among the Nature-miracles, must be held a work of power rather than of providence. A great take of fish, a sudden cessation of storm, occur within the ordinary course of events. They were notable miracles when they fell out in His hand and at His word. But this is a direct act of control over natural law, carrying with it the suggestion of Divine power, the power of Him "Who treadeth upon the waves of the sea"—Divine power, in a form fitted to remind us of the Jehovah-angel who parted the Red Sea and gave manna in the desert. Yet is it a Theanthropic miracle, as taking rank

with the others in exemplifying Christ's dominion over all the works of God for redemptive purposes. Nay, further, we should find here the hint of a precise element in redemption. The exact point of the act is not the suspension of natural law. The law of gravity is not suspended, so much as superseded, by the intervention of a higher law, viz., the liberation of a spiritual or glorified body from the bondage of earthly conditions. For Jesus Himself this act was (like the Transfiguration, say) a momentary antedating of the time when His body glorified should pass through shut doors, vanish and appear suddenly, and at length float upwards from the top of Olivet. Among other things, He was proving here His right, and ours in Him through redemption, to a spiritual body, for which in His day of power this present body of our humiliation shall be at last exchanged.*

However this may be, note well that it was only for the sake of others, and out of love for them, He thus assumed His glory, so to say, before the time. For Himself He took no unusual ways of being transported

* Perhaps we should rather say with Olshausen that such incidents as this and the Transfiguration scene, go to prove that the glorification of our Lord's body was a ripening process, of which these are glimpses. "It is common to conceive of the glorifying of our Lord's body as effected either at the Resurrection or Ascension and as the work of a moment. But if we suppose the Spirit's work in glorifying and perfecting Christ's body to have been spread over the Saviour's whole life (certain periods being still distinguished as seasons of special activity), much that is obscure will be made clear. . . . This transaction is not to be viewed as a work wrought upon Him (far less upon the waves) and effected by magic, as though some external power had laid hold of Him and borne Him up; but as the result, effected by His own will, of an energy inherently belonging to Himself . . . the manifestation of His hidden glory, designed to build up His disciples in the faith" (*On the Gospels*, ii., 188. Clark).

from place to place. "Jesus, wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well." Only this once, and for His disciples' sake, He flew on the wings of the wind and walked the raging billows. He would not turn a single stone into bread to serve His own hunger, but He multiplied the barley loaves to feed the fainting multitude. He would not suspend the laws of gravity to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple into the streets to be a world's wonder, but He flung Himself from the mount on these angry waters, and flew from crest to crest with angelic swiftness to aid His frightened followers on that night of storm.*

It was the fourth watch of the night ere He came, and when He did "He would have passed by them." No doubt all that night they often thought of Him and prayed He would come, and for this no doubt He delayed His coming. For the same reason when He came He seemed about to pass them by, that they might entreat Him. How His praying and His answering correspond! He prays before the storm: He prays during the storm. But when it is at its

* F. D. Maurice has touched another aspect of the same thought with his own characteristic felicity. "It is not a violation of the laws of nature for the Son of Man to prove that the elements are not man's masters. . . . When He raised up His disciples' hearts to trust in Him, He was teaching poor, weak, ignorant men the true law of *their* being, and thereby teaching them to reverence and not to despise the laws which He had imposed on the winds and on the waves The whole beautiful narrative is not an argumentative assertion of a Divine religion which can confute disputants, but the practical manifestation of a Divine kinghood to meet the cravings and necessities of human beings. What does a debater care for *It is I; be not afraid?* What else does a man tossed about in a tempest care for? The words were not spoken to scribes or Pharisees, and were not heard by them. They were spoken to fishermen out in a boat at night; and by such they have been heard ever since" (*Discourses on the Gospel of St. John* p. 176. London: Macmillan, 1885).

worst He answers prayer and comes to help. So is it with Him and His people still. He foresees our trials, and as our Advocate prays for us, "Simon, Simon! Satan hath desired to have you. But I have prayed for thee." He prays with us during our trials as our Intercessor, and what comfort there. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace." He delays or seems to delay His help; He passes or seems to pass us by; but it is all that we may desire Him and cry to Him. Let us never suppose there is any difficulty in bringing the Lord to save and help us. None whatever. The only difficulty is to bring ourselves to trust Him. This only is the labour. When that is done, He is with us and we with Him.

"*But when they saw Him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out: for they all saw Him, and were troubled*" (Mark vi. 49, 50). How they saw Him is not said. It was dark and stormy, but perhaps some halo of transfiguration glory surrounded His figure, or perhaps the morning grey was beginning to break in on the shadows of night, for "it was about the fourth watch," *i.e.*, close upon the dawn. Anyhow, the whole ship's crew, as one man, struck motionless with fear, bent their eyes upon the passing figure; and the next moment all broke out in one spontaneous cry. Most natural. Yet had faith been at hand it should not have been so, for the Evangelist expressly says, with a touching frankness, that their fear at first and their amazement at last were quite inconsistent with what that day's miracle of the loaves should have taught them, for he adds, "*Their heart was hardened*" (ver. 52). So our faithlessness breeds fear. It is natural that when an unusual or mysterious providence befalls us we should be troubled and dis-

concerted. But it is quite wrong and inconsistent on the part of believers. It is blameworthy hardness of heart. For the part of a child of God is to fear no appearance of His God and Father, however singular; rather to judge that its singularity must have in it some token of special design, and therefore of special mercy.

Observe how Jesus removed their fear and strengthened their faith: "*And immediately He talked with them*" (ver. 50). With His voice, the familiar conversational voice, He reassured them. How welcome it must have sounded from that strange background, and out of the mouth of that weird figure moving across the waters! So is it with Christ's people ever in their perplexing trials. It is only thus they can be reassured and calmed, for they know His voice. It is when singular providences interpret themselves in gracious words that their fear is dispelled. That phantom Jesus on the waves would only have terrified His brethren if He had not spoken. So would all power in Providence be but a riddle to us, or a terror, were it not for the word of our Lord and Brother expounded to us by His Spirit, and making providence plain. When clear, true perception of Himself goes with His acts, then amid the strangest of them all we can have joy and peace. The words uttered by that voice were most vividly remembered by the whole company: "*It is I; be not afraid.*" Years afterwards they found place exactly alike in all the records of this memorable night. And they are the words which carry comfort still to the heart of His Church, because they are the announcement of His own presence and personality. True, some of these very words, "It is I," "I am He," * made a strong band of

* Ἐγώ εἰμι, John xviii. 6.

armed men give back and fall to the ground. For the discovery of a Person behind events is always searching and discriminative. It is the assurance of One who rules over all things in love which gives courage and calmness to God's children in their times of trial.

The conclusion of the story has that slight confusion of outline which proves its simple and veracious character. All the accounts agree that it was out on the lake Jesus came to them. "*When the ship was in the midst of the sea*" (Matthew, Mark); "*When they had rowed about five-and-twenty or thirty furlongs*" (John). This entirely precludes the explanation of the rationalists, that the disciples mistook His sudden appearance on the other shore for a walking upon the waters.* But what followed is not so clear. According to the first evangelist, St. Peter's significant adventure comes in just here. The apparent divergence of the narratives towards their conclusion is an incidental proof of the actuality of that incident. It is easy to conceive how it could have perturbed the order of reminiscence. The first two Gospels say distinctly that immediately after this Jesus went up into the vessel, and the storm ceased. The fourth Gospel simply says that their fears being calmed "*they were willing therefore to receive Him into the boat:* and straightway the boat was at the land whither they were going." † These words cannot be construed to mean that they did not actually receive

* Even Weiss rather stumbles here in his attempts to get a simple riddance, as he thinks, of the difficulties presented by the narrative. On his hypothesis it is a transformed and heightened recollection, not an actual occurrence. Hence Peter's part in it is "nothing but a transparent allegory of the story of his denial." What ground has a believing commentator to stand on if he gives up the historicity of the Gospels?

† John vi. 21, R.V.

Him, for in that case the second half of the verse should have been adversatively expressed, and not consequently—"*but* straightway," not "*and* straightway." Those who see here an irreconcilable contradiction between St. John and the Synoptics betray their own foregone conclusion. To say one wills or is willing to do a thing, implying in terse narration, that it was forthwith done, is a form of speech sufficiently intelligible and actually met with in the Gospels.* The combined impression of the three accounts is unmistakeable. Jesus came to the boat's company by walking the sea. They, when their terror was allayed, received Him into the boat. The strain of their hard night's labour was then at an end; and, so soon after as to appear by comparison almost immediately, they safely reached the shore.

With regard to the feelings excited by this miracle, there are two statements supplementary of each other. Mark's account runs, "*They were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.*" † They were filled with astonishment such as they had never before experienced, even at His marvels; but, adds the Evangelist, it was a blind and senseless astonishment, for if they had considered what was implied in the multiplying of the loaves, they would have seen how like Him it was to allay the perplexities of the night by following them across the waves. He is Lord over all things, and to Him all power in heaven and on earth is given. But with many the multiplying of Jesus' wonders only hardened the heart. Matthew gives another side of the impression made: "*Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the*

* Comp. Matt. xviii. 23; John i. 43.

† Mark vi. 51. The Revisers' Greek text omits καὶ ἐθαύμαζον.

Son of God."* "They that were in the ship" seems to mean the sailors or oarsmen, and perhaps some other passengers distinct from the disciples. While His friends and disciples, unable to surmount the limitations of human familiarity, were blindly astonished, comparative strangers saw at once and acknowledged a Divine power.

4. PETER, WALKING ON THE WATER, GOES TO JESUS (Matt. xiv. 28-31). This episode, or epilogue, Matthew alone records, and it may profitably stand by itself as a distinct theme. Between the utterance of the words, "It is I; be not afraid," and the receiving Jesus into the boat this incident occurs.

Ver. 28. "*Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.*" Had there been no name given, we should have had no hesitation in concluding that it was Simon Peter who spoke thus. Philip or Thomas might still be questioning whether it was the Lord. John, doubtless, calmly adoring, was preparing to receive his Master into the ship. But it is Peter who rushes from the extreme of childish terror which he had just this moment shared with all the rest to a faith, in its boldness, bordering on presumption. He at once accepts the marvellous fact of the Lord's treading the waves. He is not questioning that it is Jesus Who so walks. His "If it be Thou" implies no doubt of the fact. Rather, he is so sure of it, he so challenges all dubiety, that at the bidding of this voice he will throw himself into the water to come to Jesus. It is no other than the Lord Who can thus walk the waves, and Peter also may do the like at the Lord's bidding. This was faith, quick and intuitive, penetrating to the heart of the deed —the Son's control over nature for His brethren's sake. It was also a sympathetic eagerness to be where

* Matt. xiv. 33. The Revisers omit "*came and.*"

Christ was, as, when in the charming scene on that same lake after the Resurrection, Peter throws himself into the sea and swims to land, that he may be first at the Master's feet. Faith was here, then, and love. Wherein lay the fault in Peter's proposal? We answer:

a. In self-confidence, self-preference: "Bid me." He would outdo and outdare all the rest with a mightier display of faith. Here, just as at the supper-table, with his greater show of humility, "Thou shalt never wash *my* feet" (John xiii.), Peter rehearsed, so to speak, his great fall. He boasted a larger faith than all the rest, and fell to a lower and pitiable depth of fear; as in that sadder after-scene he boasted a greater faithfulness, and fell to the lowest depths of unfaithfulness short of final apostasy. The secret springs of the action, in both cases, are discovered by comparison of the two. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

b. In the impulsiveness which even in religious faith is allied to rashness, and therefore to weakness. Exaggerated faith is really, as appears in this instructive story, weak faith, little faith. It is a small faith boasting itself, stretching itself out and overdoing itself. Here was Jesus. So much was plain. No one could really doubt the fact, or the proof it gave of Jesus' love and power that in this marvellous way, treading the waves underfoot, He had come to His disciples' help. It was enough; for firm and solid faith enough. But Peter must have more. So he asks that he, too, may walk on the waters—a thing to which faith was perfectly competent had it been needed, but which the Master Himself had neither suggested nor enjoined. There is a human wilfulness about it, a seeking of signs, marks

of mere power for wonder's sake, which Jesus Himself was ever careful to avoid and to repel. On this occasion, however (ver. 29), *He said, Come!* Though He had not suggested, far less commanded, He permits it. In this He acted with His consummate kindness and wisdom. To have repressed Peter's suggestion might have checked that bold and loving disposition which the Master sought to train for deeds of renown. To be let try this thing, and suffer partial failure in it, was the way by which Peter's real faith would be strengthened and his fault of carnal overboldness corrected. The Lord puts His answer in the form of a simple permission —"Come!"

"*And when Peter was come down out of the ship he walked on the water to go to Jesus.*" The disciple actually did what he had proposed—proved and honoured the power of Jesus, exemplified in a signal way the truth that "through Christ which strengtheneth him" a believer can do all things, that all things are possible to him that believeth.

Ver. 30. "*But when he saw the wind boisterous he was afraid.*" His eye somehow wandered from Jesus. He began to be self-conscious, to reflect, to take note of the winds and waves, and that moment he began to sink. His only resource was another appeal, this time one of fear and flight: "*Lord, save me!*" Trench remarks well how little availed the swimmer's art to Peter at this point. He was a good swimmer on other occasions. But this failed him now. "For there is no mingling of nature and grace in this way. He who has entered the wonder-world of grace must not suppose that he may fall out of it at any moment that he will, and betake himself to his old resources of nature; he has foregone these, and must carry out what he has

begun, or fail at his peril." The life of faith must be consistent with itself throughout.

Ver. 31. "*And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand and caught him.*" It is a most merciful Saviour Peter and we have to deal with. How He helps our weak faith and forgives our wilfulness, bears with all our follies, and glorifies His grace in us, even when we have blundered and bungled in our attempts to serve Him, so as well-nigh to bring disgrace upon His cause! "*And said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*" A most gentle and considerate rebuke. Gentle, for the Lord acknowledges His servant's faith, while He chides its littleness and rebukes the doubt. Considerate, for it is not administered till Peter is saved from sinking and held safe in Jesus' hand. Further, it is so given as to honour all that was really right in the disciple's action. It is not, "Wherefore didst thou come?" or, "propose to come?" but, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" Why not go through with what was undertaken in such faith?

If we inquire for the exact point of the miraculous in this incident, we must find it in Peter's being permitted to share so far in that mastery over the lower, natural law through a higher, which Jesus as Head of redeemed humanity was then exercising. It comes into line with most of our Lord's acts of power over human nature and its needs, when we observe that faith on the part of Peter was the mediating link. "So long as the inner soul of Peter was purely and simply turned towards the Person of the Lord, he was capable of receiving within himself the fulness of Christ's life and spirit, so that what Christ could do he could do; but so soon as his capacity for receiving the Spirit was contracted by his giving place and weight to a foreign

power, the result was . . . that the sea-walker fell back under the dominion of earthly elements." *

The spiritual analogue runs easily from this point of view. The Person of Christ is the centre of all working power for His people in the spiritual sphere. So long as their attention and trust are fixed on Him in believing work, they share His power and difficulties cease to exist. Their faith removes mountains, or walks on the waves. But when we begin to measure our position and its probabilities by sense, by human calculation, according to man's judgment, that moment we begin to fail, for we lose spiritual power. Those who are working for Christ in this world are engaged in that to which human power is quite unequal. The whole secret of their success is to keep constant and believing hold of Him; for He hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; so that we may boldly say, The Lord is mine helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

The spiritual lessons of this episodic scene are these:—

(1) The danger of *self-preference* in Christ's service, for Peter's "Bid *me*" was at the root of his failure.

(2) The mistake of looking at the *hindrances* and *difficulties* of such work, rather than at the power and Person of Him Whose work it is. It was when Peter looked away from the Saviour to the storm that he began to sink.

(3) The evil of *wilfulness*, seen even in *wilful* ways of serving Christ. The real error which Peter committed lies in that he undertook what the Lord did not require of him. No doubt he asked and obtained His permission; but even this shows how the Lord may permit

* Olshausen, *On the Gospels*, ii., 192.

His servants to find the bottom of their own resolutions, and in His wise love teach them deep and useful lessons by their own failures. Peter assayed here to do by faith what faith was no doubt quite competent to do had the Master needed it and asked it. But taking it up of his own motion, even with the Lord's permission, the disciple threw himself into circumstances of danger and difficulty to which his measure of faith proved unequal.

To aim at being for Christ, to expect to do for Christ, what Christ has neither enjoined nor promised is really not faith, but fanaticism. There is a considerable resemblance between the two, on the surface. The one has been again and again mistaken for the other. There is a likeness in their tone, in their earnestness, in their ardour, sometimes for a while in their effects; but they are entirely different in their source, their principle, and their results. Faith arises out of grace. Fanaticism has its source in self. Faith is ruled by the Word of the Lord. Fanaticism by the wish, will, and impulse of the creature. Faith results in solid fruits and works for Christ. Fanaticism burns itself out in a fruitless fervour, or dashes itself to pieces in a terrible fall. The dangers of our time lie, however, for the most part in quite another direction. The material and the secular have in these days the most powerful sway over the minds of men. The spiritual is treated as if it did not exist at all. Far more frequently than fanaticism is mistaken for faith, is faith ridiculed and run down as fanatical. And in truth all real living and working for Christ has in it an element of paradox, which the world is very apt to mistake for enthusiasm. It is aiming at results, and expecting results which lie quite beyond the channel of ordinary, rational life

There is no real success in the work of Christ's kingdom which is not to man's judgment as impossible as to tread the waves. When Paul went to convert the nations of Greece and Rome to the faith of the Crucified Nazarene, he went to walk on the waters. All reason was against the probability of his success. When Luther revived the Gospel of free grace in face of the Roman hierarchy and the empire, he went to walk on the waters. Pope, emperor, princes, and churchmen were ready to swallow him up. There is not a true missionary abroad or true mission worker at home but goes to seek results above nature, by methods that work beyond reason. If we would truly serve Jesus and His kingdom, walk on the waves we must; for we walk by faith, not by sight. Only let us gather from this story the condition, and take our motto from Isaiah rather than from Peter. Instead of choosing for oneself the path of duty and saying, "Lord, bid me come," let us put ourselves and our service always into His hands, saying in answer to His question, "Who will go for us?" "Here am I; send me."

VI.

THE SECOND MIRACULOUS FEEDING.

MATT. xv. 29-38, xvi. 4-12; MARK viii. 1-9, 13-21.

THE principle upon which we comment, without hesitation, on this as a transaction distinct from the feeding of the five thousand has been already announced. This second feeding is recorded in two of the Synoptic Gospels, in both of which the first has also been described. The substantial historicity of the evangelic narrative must stand or fall by such features. The plain and clear judgment of the narrators is that this was another gracious work of Jesus to be related beside and quoted in addition to that former multiplying of the loaves. The criticism which sets aside this judgment usually finds nothing in any part of the Gospels so definitely related that it may not be moulded as the critic wills. Faithfulness to our *bonâ fide* acceptance of the Gospels as history leaves us no alternative in such a case. But there are minor details here which fortify the assumption that this is a work distinct from the former. The occasion and the motive of the second miracle differ from those of the first. The circumstantial details of the two transactions are carefully and sharply set side by side, especially in the recapitulatory conversation recorded by both Evangelists

in immediate sequence to this occurrence itself. The differences will come out as we read (1) the story of the feeding four thousand, and then (2) the after conversation in which both are recounted.

1. The Story and its Lessons. Though the locality was not wide apart from that of the former feeding, nor the lapse of time between the two very considerable, this incident plainly occurs in a new connection and after a distinct crisis in the Saviour's ministry. Since the former gathering and the dispersion which followed it there has occurred the visit to the district of Tyre and Sidon. The incidents of the Syro-Phœnician woman and of the deaf man at Decapolis have just been related. The neighbourhood of the lake has again been reached. The spot, so far as we can learn, is a mountain solitude on the eastern side. After an extended and fatiguing journey, Jesus and His disciples sat down there—pitched their encampment for rest. But soon the magic of His name begins to act. Thousands flock out of town and village, till the desert becomes like a busy fair. This time it is no holiday business on the people's part, no mere divergence on a Passover journey. It is a deliberate gathering of great multitudes, who seized the opportunity, not previously presented to them, of bringing their diseased and distressed to the Healer's feet. He healed them all, and doubtless interspersed words of teaching and warning. Three days have passed. These wondering throngs increased and lingered until it became necessary to consider how they were to be sustained.

It is Jesus Himself, not the disciples, who on this occasion suggest the question of relief for their hunger. He states the case carefully—the greatness of their number, the length of time, the weakly state of some,

the great distances others have come. "I have compassion on the multitudes." Such emphasis of pity called forth by so common a distress is characteristic of Jesus and His Gospel. No one ever cared as He did for men's spiritual interests. It is the best proof of His greatness and completeness as man that this highest estimate of the soul is combined with tenderest care for the body. The divinity of His religion comes out precisely on the same lines. Christianity, indeed, puts such supreme value on the soul that it seems sometimes to overlook the body. Yet its true spirit comes out in the combined care for both. It emphasizes the worth of the immortal being, man, and the consequent moment of everything belonging to that being. There is no side-proof of its Divine origin, of its universal human fitness, to which it can more confidently appeal than this; that it has done more for the physical nature of man, for his present improvement, for his bodily relief and welfare than any other religion. "More" is too feeble an expression. Ask Paganism at its best in the history of civilized Greece and Rome. Ask Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Confucianism in the present. Where are their asylums, their hospitals, their reformatories, their dispensaries and charitable institutions? Nowhere. This word of Jesus, "*I have compassion on the multitude*," is the seed-plot of all the philanthropy of modern civilization, which it needs only the as yet faintly-whispered cruelties of modern Positivism to bring into brighter relief.

The conversation which ensues between the Master and the disciples closely resembles that on the former occasion. He proposes to supply the people's immediate wants in terms which seem to say that He has full provision ready. They remind Him that all stores

are nigh exhausted. He replies, 'Use what you have;' 'See how much there is, or how little;' 'Bring it out and set it before them.' They made their answer about the seven loaves and the few little fishes. He went on as if they had said seven hundred. In all this the disciples must have felt conscious of being led over familiar ground, and might have blushed to find their faith so slow upon the road. For not anticipating the miracle, we cannot blame them. It was not His wont to work miracles for the supply of ordinary wants. But they were wrong in not immediately remembering, when He proposed to supply the want, what already tested power He had for so doing. We wonder at their unbelieving forgetfulness. As face answers to face in the glass, so does the heart of man to man. This unbelief of theirs is just like ours. We have been delivered, and we forget the deliverance. When we are next in straits, we think we shall never be again relieved. We stand despairing at the foot of the next hill after our gracious Deliverer has removed mountains. Each time our trials rise, we act as if God's grace were exhausted and His mercy clean gone for ever. Was there ever anything more like our own hearts' folly than the question of these disciples: "*From whence can a man satisfy these with bread here in the wilderness?*"

Then follows the sitting down of the multitude, the blessing of the scanty provision, its distribution at the hands of the disciples, the entire satisfying of the people, and the gathering up of the fragments. It is impossible to read this account in good faith and not admit that a direct and godlike act of creation is described in it. By no device of misinterpretation can this transaction be explained away. There is no

shadow of plausibility on this occasion for the suggestion that His generosity stimulated others to bring out their hidden stores. This was no passing pilgrim company like the former. It was a steady concourse, three days gathered. Everything was exhausted. There was nothing left to bring out. Perhaps it is this impossibility of getting over the Divine in the story which has prompted the theory that it is only another version of the former. But the honest critic will have this consideration left him—that the reporters and narrators of the incident, even if there was but one, must have believed it to be a veritable act of miraculous or creative supply, else it never could have taken this form in their account.*

Think of these thousands from various places and stations, dwellers in town and hamlet, remote upland, or busy shore, all brought to Jesus' feet, wrapped there three days in the quiet of the mountain solitude, sharers in the blessedness of those healing miracles, happy hearers of those glorious words of life eternal, now seated together at this wondrous feast, so simple in its materials, so Divine in its plenty. It is a scene fitted to touch the imagination and the heart. Can we fail to see what it pictures and prophesies? It proclaims and predicts the Evangelical Christ Jesus had compassion on the multitudes, and they followed Him then, and the common people heard Him gladly. It is so still. Through all the centuries and amid all the sections of Christendom it has been ever so. Where Christ is lifted up He draws and heals and feeds the nations. One cannot think of the great recuperative movements of Christianity—its successful appeals to the conscience of mankind, the occasional swing of its

* See this acutely argued by Dr. Bruce, p. 221, *op. cit.*

refreshings and revivings, or the constant hold it has on the human heart even where formalism, ceremonialism, traditionalism, or indifference have stiffened its cultivated followers—without seeing in those Galilean gatherings a foreshadow of its history. Christ feeds the multitudes always with the perpetual feast and freshness of His Word. The Gospel of Jesus is its own attraction, because it provides a real substance for an immortal nature to feed on. "I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to ME shall never hunger; he that believeth on ME shall never thirst. . . . If any man eat of this Bread he shall live for ever; and the Bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Some subsidiary lessons the details of the story have for us.

a. A lesson in *generosity.* Jesus made His disciples bring out their seven loaves and small fishes, and give thus their all away. No doubt some of them wondered why. It is our common plea for withholding from the cause of charity or of religion that what we have we shall need for ourselves—at least there is a fear that we may. But as our household commentator has it, "Niggardliness for to-day, arising out of thoughtfulness for to-morrow, is a complication of corrupt affections that ought to be mortified."* Withholding from a just claim of beneficence or piety is wrong. Withholding on the plea of carefulness for the future is a double wrong on the part of a Christian.

b. A lesson of *thankfulness.* First, Jesus took the seven loaves and brake them and gave to His disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. Then, as if they had overlooked the few small fishes, Mark relates that they also were brought to Him, and He blessed and

* Matthew Henry, *in loc.*

commanded to set them also before them. Two words are used—"Gave thanks" and "blessed"*—one in connection with the first part of the meal, and the other with the second. With such words He turned these poor materials into a royal feast. Let us also learn that giving of thanks is a blessing upon our daily food. We cannot rival the miracle, but we can imitate the spirit of it. It is a pithy proverb, "Nature is content with little, Grace with less, but Lust with nothing." A thankful spirit will bless and in a sense multiply our bread. One has seen a Christian household, where the housemaster's "Grace before meat" was so full of adoration and simple, grateful piety, that it seemed to shed a lustre over the table and everything on it.

2. THE RECOUNTING OF BOTH THE MIRACULOUS FEEDINGS (Matt. xvi. 4-12; Mark viii. 13-21). A short while after the second Feeding the disciples crossed with Jesus to the western shore of the lake, about the district of Magdala (or Magadan, R.V.). There they were met by a fresh outburst of scepticism and opposition from the leading Jewish parties, and after a brief stay He left them and was re-crossing to the eastern side. The disciples had forgotten to take bread, and had no more than a single loaf with them in the boat. In the course of conversation Jesus said, "Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod." Even while under the Master's teaching they were not without risk of being swayed by the current opinion of their time. He was warning them against the influence of those from whom they had just parted—the traditionalism of the one party and the secularism of the other. The disciples missed His meaning. They took His remark

* Εὐχαριστήσας: εὐλογήσας.

as a covert allusion to their carelessness about the ship's provision; just as people still will find petty allusions in the great words that are read or spoken to them from the pulpit in Christ's name. But He made good use of their strange blunder. With a sharp but affectionate rebuke He reads them an unforgetable lesson. 'Bread! Why should any of God's children, who are better than the ravens and the sparrows, the lilies and the grass of the field, be concerned about bread? The Great Householder waters His flowers and fodders His cattle: will He not feed His children? O ye of little faith, do ye not yet understand, neither remember?' And then with great emphasis and exactness He makes them repeat the details of the two miracles of the Loaves.

If we follow the suggestions of this recapitulation, we shall find—

(1) That our Lord makes His disciples keep in mind that there were two distinct occasions of this sort. Twice had He filled the people in the wilderness from an armful of bread. He makes them recall and recount to Him the number of loaves to begin with—five in the one case, seven in the other; the number of men fed on each occasion—five thousand and four thousand ("besides women and children," add the Evangelists in both accounts); the number of baskets in each case filled with the remains of the feast; last, the precise kind of receptacle used on each occasion, the word being carefully preserved in both instances, and in the recital of the story here; "basket" (κόφινος) in the first, "hamper" (σπυρίς) in the second,—twelve baskets, seven hampers. It is not easy to see how more pains could have been taken to obviate the suggestion that the second incident was a mere altered

version of the first. Particularly is this detail about the baskets or hampers of fragments an incidental confirmation of the actuality of both events. It might appear to one unacquainted with their customs a strange thing that in gatherings of such people in such places there should be baskets at all. But we learn from those who knew their customs well that wherever there were Jews on a journey there was sure to be just such baskets to carry their provisions, and even their bedding, though it were but clean straw. It was of moment for a scrupulous Hebrew to preserve himself from ceremonial defilement when travelling; and it is believed that in this way they often provided sleeping accommodation for themselves.* It is a singular confirmation of this account, as well as of the distinction between the basket and the hamper, that the historian in Acts ix. 25 uses the second word (σπυρίς) to denote the receptacle in which St. Paul effected his escape when he was let over the walls of Damascus. It is but one among many instances of the significant fact that the more minutely and fairly we scrutinize the Scripture records the more do they justify themselves as accurate history.

2. Some have ingeniously made the repetition of this miracle symbolic or prophetic. Hilary and Augustine are quoted in favour of the exposition that Christ showed Himself twice, in acted parable, as the Bread of Life—to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.† In support of the theory that this second was a miracle wrought among a less exclusively Jewish, perhaps even a semi-heathen, population, Mark's previous mention of

* "Judaeis, quorum cophinus foenumque supellex."
Juvenal Satiræ, iii., 13.

† See Trench, *in loc.*

"the coasts of Decapolis," the expression of the people's feelings as given in Matthew, "They glorified the God of Israel," the more immediate action of the Lord Himself in the second Feeding, have all been adduced. If an intention of symbolizing, under this second Feeding, the future offer of life in Christ to the nations be admitted, some confirmation could be derived from its juxtaposition in the narrative to the story of the Syro-Phœnician woman; some use also could be made of the symbolic numbers characteristic of each miracle,* and some light would be thrown upon the failure of the disciples to expect a mode of relief from the perplexity, similar to that which they had once before experienced. In this case, their not expecting Him to do such a work again in a half-heathen district would foreshadow their subsequent slowness to understand that "God had granted unto the Gentiles also repentance unto life." On the other hand, it has been often noted that Luke's omission of the second Feeding would be difficult to account for, had he shared the opinion that many of the recipients were Gentiles, still more had he believed it to symbolize the great Pauline revelation of Christ for the world.

3. We may content ourselves with seeing clearly that the reduplication of the miracle and the recapitulation of both were meant to enforce the duty of remembering the Lord's mercies. "Do ye not yet understand, neither remember?" (Matt. xvi. 9). Let us note that word "remember." To forget is the habit of unbelief,—to forget past deliverances. "Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of Thy mercies; but provoked Him at

* 5,000, 5, 12 in the one; 4,000, 7, 7 in the other. Westcott, *Characteristics, etc.*, note on p. 12.

the Red Sea."* The whole history of Israel in the desert is set before us as an ensample of the terribleness of unbelief. It is the habit of forgetting, questioning, provoking the Lord at every fresh difficulty. The habit of faith, on the other hand, is that of remembering the Lord's mercies, counting upon His promises, and treasuring up their fulfilments. "The Lord which delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."† The Psalter is full of it. "I will remember the works of the Lord. Surely I will remember Thy wonders of old;" "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Thy works; I muse on the work of Thy hands."‡ To cultivate the spirit of accurate and full memory of the Lord's wonders and deliverances in our own case and that of others is the discipline of faith, that by which it is increased, made joyful, thankful, abounding. "Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: He is their help and shield. The Lord hath been mindful of us: He will bless us."§

* Psalm cvi. 7.
† 1 Sam. xvii. 37.
‡ Psalms lxxvii., cxliii.
§ Psalm cxv. 11, 12.

VII.

THE COIN IN THE FISH'S MOUTH.

MATT. xvii. 24-7.

THE manner of the narrator here should guide us as to the exact use of the narration. The story is not strictly a miracle-narrative at all, for the miracle is not actually told. Yet, so entirely is the actuality of the deed taken for granted, that in this respect it much resembles other miracle-narratives in which the Evangelists hasten on to the purpose or the results without dwelling on particulars (*e.g.*, John ii. 1-11). The miracle is assumed, and no explanations nor substantiating details are thought necessary. The uses intended by this narrative are (i) *doctrinal* and (ii) *ethical.* The doctrine taught is the place of Jesus in the kingdom of heaven—His own place of Sonship by right of nature, and that which He wins for His followers in grace. The moral enforced is, that greatness in the kingdom is best proved by service and humility. The context of the story and the fine turns of the conversation are plainly the things on which the Evangelist intends the effect to rest. The actual deed—the finding of the *stater* in the mouth of the fish—is to him so much a mere matter of course, that it is left to the sense of the reader to supply.

i. To apprehend the point of the story the somewhat nice results of the best translation must be regarded. Readers of the A. V. alone—*i.e.*, when not careful students of the margin—are left in ignorance of it by the want of specific accuracy in rendering the names of two ancient coins.* The question raised in the conversation between Peter and the tax-collectors, as the A.V. puts it, is about "tribute." But really the thing in question is not the secular tax-levying which comes up in chap. xxii., where there was an attempt made to entrap the Lord into a political discussion on a question entirely of the Roman or Imperial taxation. There may have been an intention, on this occasion also, to embarrass or perplex, though it is not apparent on the surface of the dialogue. But the question concerned another kind of tax altogether. It was not the tribute (*κήνσον*) due to Cæsar, but the temple-tax due to Jehovah, which was the subject of inquiry.† The state of the facts is this: the law described in Exod. xxx. 12-16 had fixed at half a shekel ‡ the sum to be paid by every Israelite of full age at the sacred enumeration. This sum was considered partly as a donation for the erection of the sanctuary, partly as a ransom or

* *δίδραχμα*, in ver. 24, and its double, *στατήρ*, in ver. 27, which the Revisers have rendered "half-shekel" and "shekel" respectively.

† Even so, however, one of their favourite dilemmas might be intended by the Jewish leaders. 'Does He pay the tribute, then is He subservient to the Temple, and is no Divine Messiah. Does He decline, then we may charge Him with dishonouring Moses and the law.' Thus Dean Howson, *Meditations on the Miracles of Christ*, Second Series, p. 75. But the interpretation seems harsh.

‡ The Greek translator, using the very term *δίδραχμον* (Exod. xxx. 13) which is used in our text, helps us to follow the import of the whole transaction. For some niceties of scholarship, however, as to these coins, and the changes in their usage, consult the foot-notes in Trench on this miracle.

atonement money. This ancient act became, after the Captivity, the warrant for a yearly collection of personal poll-tax for the support of the Temple service. As all members of the Covenant people—those living out of Palestine not excepted—had to perform this religious duty, delegates from the Temple travelled at the appropriate season through all the provinces for the purpose of collecting it. Some hold that by the time of our Lord this tax had been secularized by the Romans or annexed to the Imperial exactions. Others, with better evidence, believe this undoubted transference to have taken place later. The narrative certainly conveys an impression of manner on the part of the collectors suitable to the gathering of a semi-voluntary contribution rather than to the inevitable demands of the Roman *publicanus*. The incident in our history occurs at a moment when the Lord and His Apostles had just returned to what might be called their own stated residence, after a considerable absence. Peter is met, alone, by those who collected the Temple money with the question whether or not his Master was in the habit of paying this sacred tribute. The words suggest a widespread recognition, by this time, of His place as a religious teacher. The questioners thought it not improbable that, like some other persons of religious standing—priests and Levites, for example—Jesus would hold Himself exempt. Peter, either counting simply on precedent, or "zealous for the Lord's honour, and confident that His piety would make Him prompt in whatever God's ordinance required," * answers without hesitation that his Master would pay the tax. Hereupon hangs the conversation which follows between the Lord and Peter, so soon as the disciple had rejoined his Master. Jesus

* Trench, *in loc.*

takes him up at once on the point, discovers a startling knowledge of what had passed, and puts it to him, in parabolic fashion, whether upon reflection he finds that he has answered rightly. The thing in question is a tribute of the kingdom of heaven, a contribution to the support of the Lord's house. Now, when kings take taxes, do they exact them of the children of the palace, or only of other people, *i.e.*, of their subjects in general? The answer is plain and the inference inevitable. The sons of royalty are untaxed. Had Peter forgot his own distinct confession (recorded in the previous chapter of this gospel)? Had he forgot that Jesus was Lord of the Temple, neither a subject nor a servant, but a Son in His Father's house? Had He not showed on other occasions that the Temple was His to defend from intrusion, to clear from abuse? Even suppose there had been previous payment of this tribute on the part of Jesus, the time was come—in the unfolding of the doctrine of His Messiahship—to plant it rightly and firmly in the mind of the disciples that His Divine claim exempted Him *de jure* from such an exaction.* It was needful to carry the demonstration so far. This is the doctrinal aim of the whole passage. Its worth in the eyes of the recording Evangelist was to bring out how, indirectly, subtly, but not on that account the less effectively, the Lord had used this incident to assert that He was the Christ, the Son of God, therefore not owing the temple-tribute; that He was the sinless Redeemer of a sinful people, and therefore not personally chargeable

* So Bengel, founding upon Peter's affirmative, says, "*Ergo Jesus etiam priore anno solverat. Sed interim solenniter pro filio Dei agnitus decentissime jamnunc apud Petrum dignitati suæ cavet.*" See his *Gnomon, in loc.*

with that poll-tax which suggested an atonement for sin.

ii. So much for the *doctrinal* side of the conversation; but now for its *moral* or *ethical* aspect. A comparison of the synoptic narratives makes it plain that during this homeward journey to Capernaum, probably near its close, occurred the dispute among the disciples about priority in the kingdom which drew from the Lord several touching and instructive utterances. There is reason to think this is one of them. The words immediately following our story in Matthew's Gospel tell us that at the same time * they came to put their question to Jesus on this topic. Mark says that, "being in the house, He asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?" The suggestion has much probability, that with Peter alone in the house the Lord here forestalls the discussion and makes this incident bear upon it. It is when viewed in this connection that the present story becomes luminous, and that the words of Jesus about the temple-tax are seen to have their moral design. To teach "the foremost disciple" a lesson of humility and self-effacement, Jesus directs his attention pointedly to His own claim, to His willingness to waive it, and to His reason for so doing, viz., lest offence should follow upon a premature or punctilious assertion of even a Divine right. This, rather than any other, is the point of ethical moment in the narrative—not so much the poverty of His lot as Son of man, His command over the resources of nature and providence as Son of God, the extraordinary manner in which upon occasion His necessities were relieved—not so much these, as the forbearance and self-restraint of the Kingdom's Head; an example to His followers

* ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ, Matt. xviii. 1.

of meekness and self-repression for the Kingdom's sake. The key to the moral intention of the story, then, lies in the words, "But lest we cause them to stumble" (R.V.).* It was a lesson of meekness and wisdom. Jesus waives the exercise of a right founded upon the plainest and most momentous grounds, lest the exercise of it in the circumstances should prove a stumbling-block to those who were as yet unprepared to receive the grounds themselves. Thus does Jesus set forth one of the most characteristic features of Christian morality.

After these two lessons—the Christological and the Ethical—have been thus taught in words, Jesus instructs Peter how both shall be countersigned and confirmed by deed. The disciple is to take his fishing gear and go down to the lake, there to make his cast, to take up the first fish that rose from the deep to his hook, and, opening its mouth, he shall find in it a *stater* or *shekel*, the amount which would exactly cover the temple-tribute for two. This he is to take and give to the collectors for his Lord and for himself.† The combination of humility and majesty, simplicity and dignity, in the whole transaction is striking. He who had not

* See Dr. Bruce, *Miraculous Element, etc.*, pp. 232, 233. The author's exegetical tact is in this instance conspicuous.

† Why "for Me and thee," with no mention of the others? Bengel has the too ingenious (?) suggestion that the other disciples were as yet under twenty years of age, therefore not personally liable to the tax, but were reckoned "the family" of Jesus, who represented them; whereas Peter as a family-man must pay for himself. This commentator also gives a six-pointed view of the fish-taking itself, as *Multiplex omniscientiæ et omnipotentiæ miraculum*. Weiss prefers to regard it simply as an instance of "superhuman knowledge of a miraculous dispensation. . . . In order to ratify His independence God will give Him, in a miraculous way, what Jesus desires to pay to Him, out of regard for men" (*Life of Christ*, ii., p. 337, *note*). But he hints, in the text, at misapprehension of an oral tradition.

where to lay His head, has not wherewithal to pay this impost. Yet the lesson He would impress upon His own followers, to allay their shallow ambition, and the deference He would render to the religious feelings of His countrymen, made the payment imperative. The real interests of his kingdom must never suffer for want of internal supply while He who is its Head is King and Lord of all. Therefore a singular mode of supplying the immediate want is employed, to stamp with the signet of miracle the incident and all its lessons.

These lessons are: (1) To declare the Messiahship of Jesus as Son of God in the highest sense, and Head of the kingdom of heaven. (2) To show that the Kingdom has for its internal supply and support a treasury as inexhaustible as that universe which is at the disposal of its Lord. (3) To set forth the forbearance and self-repression with which even Divine and spiritual claims are to be presented to men at large, especially when these affect the consciences of others.

Certain subordinate aspects of these lessons, especially of the last, deserve a word further. Is the claim of sonship in the house of God, with its consequent privilege, made by Jesus for Himself alone, or does it in any sense include also His followers? If the latter, how is the assertion of it to be tempered with the same moral reservation as the Lord Himself has exercised? An immediate application of the principle all round, as Weiss says, would have opened a wider perspective. In the completed kingdom of God all its members would be sons in the fullest sense. If the kingdom was destined to grow until it included the whole nation, then would all be free from the temple-tax; and, since the Temple service could not be upheld without it, this maxim of

Jesus presented the prospect of a time when, with the completion of the theocracy, the need of a special sacred building would disappear. That Jesus did not wish this inference to take immediate effect is obvious. For the principle which He here so carefully sets forth, and on which He acted at the time, is not to advance His kingdom by any offensive disturbance of the existing religious arrangements. But the truth which He announces in this utterance, "Then are the children free," was undoubtedly that which brought about the deliverance of the Christian Church in the Apostolic age from the bondage of the older dispensation.

Again, let us assume that one distinctive intention of the miracle is to set forth that Christ as Head of the kingdom secures its internal supplies.* Let us even suppose that Christ's words here anticipate in a germinal way the Apostolic principle that the workers and ministers of the kingdom are to be "free" from worldly toil and assessment—are, in short, to be supported for the Gospel's sake. The story will in that case convey to Christians a moral hint for the application and regulation of the principle. Bengel has shrewdly remarked that men who are occupied with worldly affairs take offence at the children of God most easily when money matters are in question.† It was precisely on a question of money that our Lord was most careful not to give offence. And in this His closest followers have kept themselves scrupulously in His footsteps. If St. Paul's doctrine as to ministerial support be based on one part

* So Westcott, *Characteristics of the Gospel Miracles*, p. 21, note.

† "*Facillime, ubi de pecunia agitur, scandalum capiunt a sanctis homines negotia mundana curantes*" (*Gnomon, in loc.*). Cf. Steinmeyer's remarks on making this quotation, *The Miracles of Our Lord, etc.*, p. 235.

of the Master's teaching here, his refined and conscientious mode of applying it is as manifestly an exemplification of the other. "So hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things, . . . that when I preach the gospel I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel" (1 Cor. ix. 14, 15, 18).

VIII.

THE WITHERING OF THE FRUITLESS FIG-TREE.

MATT. xxi. 17-22; MARK xi. 12-14, 20-4. Cf. LUKE xiii. 6-9.

THIS incident stands entirely alone among the miracles as the only one which is not of a beneficent or merciful character. Long custom has made all readers familiar with the designation of it as a Miracle of Judgment. The expression is misleading. It was a symbol or prediction of judgment. The burden it bore in act and sign was doom for that which the fruitless fig-tree represented. But so far as concerns the literal object upon which the word fell, the expression is too large. It is out of all just proportion of thought and language to place the blasting of a wayside tree over against Christ's numberless miracles of mercy, and note it as a Judgment-miracle. Indeed, the incident barely falls within the class of miracles. The supernatural element in it is predictive rather than directly miraculous. The word spoken against the tree was fulfilled in a way so notable and immediate as to mark a Divine hand. But in its proper object and scope it was really an acted parable, like those symbolic actions or prophecies 'without words' of which the ancient seers Jeremiah and Ezekiel furnish plenty of instances.

The last stage of the Lord's ministry has been reached. It is early morning on one of the days of the Passion week. He has left the Bethany home, where He spent His nights, and is passing along the way towards the capital. His heart is full of the disappointment and sorrow which the retrospect of His three years' ministry excited within Him. The rejection of His Messianic claim by the leaders of the people has long been plain. Even the people have answered to His call with no steadiness or depth. An occasional burst of enthusiasm there was, like the last, which took place the day before, as He wended over Olivet, but no permanent conviction or acceptance. And now the forecast of their final rejection of Him mingles in His mind with the darker forecast of their doom as a Church and nation. The incident which befell on the way that morning gives to all this the graphic and fateful expression which one notices so often in the minuter incidents accompanying some great historical transaction. Many fig-trees lined the slopes along which Jesus and His disciples were passing; indeed, they gave its name to one of the neighbouring villages. It was an April morning—not yet, therefore, the ordinary time even for the earliest of these having fruit, which usually takes place in June. But one fig-tree stood out from all its fellows. It shone from afar in precocious glow of glossy leaves; and as in this tree the fruit for the most part precedes the foliage, the inference was natural and tempting. The first ripe fresh figs would be grateful food on which to break one's fast. After some considerable *détour* the tree was reached, only to find that it "bore nothing but leaves." The prophetic temperature of the moment makes itself felt in the very mode of the narrative. "*And He answered and said*

unto it, No man eat fruit from thee henceforward for ever." The narrative of the first Evangelist suggests that then, on the instant, as if touched by an electric current, the tree paled to its centre. But it was only as the company passed the same place on the following morning that they saw the fig-tree "*withered away from the roots.*" It was Peter who reminded his Master of the blighting words spoken the morning before, and, pointing to the blasted trunk and scattered leaves, not only emphasized its fulfilment, but elicited from the Lord an explanation. In their direct bearing our Lord's words give the key to the precise nature of the incident. The withering of that tree was Heaven's answer to the Son of man's request. It was a result of faith—of faith in God. Such signs as these accompanied and sealed His ministry, because it was a ministry of constant faithfulness to His Father in heaven, of constant correspondence with His purpose, and of constant trust in His superintending power. Let the disciples but have such faith, and to them also it shall be given to do such things and greater things than these; "*and all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*"

But where are the words that should justify the symbolic or prophetic application of the incident to the downfall of the Jewish nation and Church? Literally they are not given. They are easily read, however, between the lines of our Lord's answer to Peter; especially when the story is set in the light which converges upon it from the entire evangelic narratives. The incident itself would be meaningless, and the words used about the tree and its curse would be utterly overstrained and disproportionate, could we not

read through it all the larger prophetic meaning.* But besides this there is much in the cognate passages of the Gospels to help us to the meaning. Several months before, if not even a year or so earlier, Jesus had thrown into one of His brief, terse parables on public affairs all the force of a vision or prophecy (Luke xiii. 1-9). Some sad stories of bloodshed and disaster had been related in His hearing, and the usual casuistic question raised about the guilt of those who had so suffered under Divine judgments. Jesus gave that wise and humane reply which has become classic to the modern mind, but His prophetic spirit soared upwards on the suggestions of the conversation. From its native height His soul surveyed the years past and to come; and His burden was of judgment. He put His vision in the form of a dialogue overheard between the owner and the caretaker of a barren fig-tree. "*Three years*," says the one, "*have I come seeking fruit on this tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?*" This was judgment; and without any express key to it every commentator with his eyes open finds that it was the judgment on a spiritually fruitless priesthood and people which the Saviour foresaw. But the judgment had not yet become ripe. It was possible, barely possible, it might yet be averted; and the apologue

* The Philistinism of many commentators appears at its baldest on this incident. The solemn discussions about whether a tree could incur moral blame, could therefore justly be subjected to curse, and so on, are surely rather preposterous. It is necessary in commentators to have a little imagination, and especially not to take prophetic speech in prosaic literality. Scarcely less preposterous are the so-called moral problems raised as to our Lord's apparent disappointment at the fruitlessness of the tree, when "by His Divine power He must have known that there were no figs upon it!" How on such principles of interpretation the Gospels could describe a human life of the Son of God it is impossible to conceive.

ends with the tender, but almost desponding, proposal of the vine-dresser, that the tree should have another year of respite, the worker another year of care and culture to bestow upon it, and that in the event of failure this should be final.

Is it possible to doubt what would be the impression on the minds of the men who had heard this apologue not so long before, when they stood that morning round Peter pointing out to them the doom of the fruitless fig-tree? It needed no words to carry home the sad conclusion. The year of frist had passed, and passed in vain. They expected no words, in that circle of His inner teaching, alone with Him and the mute symbol of their nation's doom. They were accustomed to read His mind in such symbolic actions. But indeed words had not been wanting. It was only two days before that, as they wound in festal procession down the slopes of Olivet, they had marked Him pour out His soul in that unforgetable lamentation over the "too late" of His misled and miserable fellow-countrymen (Luke xix. 41-4). Moreover, both the Evangelists, who record our present incident, follow it up almost immediately with the parable of the Wicked Husbandman. Matthew, as usual, giving the words of the Lord more fully, includes in the same connection the cognate parables of the Two Sons and the Marriage Feast with its rejected invitations. The parable first mentioned, occurring in both the Gospels which narrate our present story, and in that kind of consecution which denotes a strong traditional, *i.e.*, historical, continuity, contains precisely the ideas that are appropriate to this symbol. Those to whose keeping the privileges of God's vineyard had been intrusted for many generations are in graphic figure shown to have abused their trust in the most

shameful manner, are reminded that they have maltreated the messengers sent to them age after age, and are now represented, in a figure which has the vividness of direct accusation, as ready to put to death the Son and Heir. The parable ends with words which seem to echo the language of this present symbol, in a prophecy of judgment the plainest and most awful: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." *

Some commentators think they may read this or something approaching to it in the words which did actually accompany the Withering of the Fig-tree. Our Lord assures His disciples that they too in the exercise of faith should say as He had said to the fig-tree, and the result should follow; nay, the still greater result of removing this mountain should be granted to their prayer of faith. It is possible to read this as a veiled prediction that the transference of God's kingdom from the unworthy nation should take place through their ministry; and even still greater marvels—the removal of the mountain of Gentile prejudice and pagan idolatry.† Be this as it may, the appropriateness and force of the original action remains, illuminated as it is by the words and events among which it is set down. Three years the Lord Christ had sought fruit on this fair tree of the Jewish Church and people. He sought fruit, and He expected it. Appearances made that expectation not only reasonable but probable. The undeniable piety of Israel in those times towards the Law and the prophets, the punctuality and anxiety with which the sacrifices and ceremonies were performed, seemed to promise the joy-

* Matt. xxi. 43.

† See Steinmeyer, *The Miracles of Our Lord*, p. 268.

ful reception of Him to whose coming they all pointed forward. Nevertheless it failed. The Messenger of the Covenant, when He came to His Temple, was rejected by His nation. The tree full of leaves proved itself to the searching Eye to be void of fruit. Sentence is pronounced—the sin of fruitlessness is changed into the curse of barrenness. And as that withered tree stood in sight of the passers-by a weird prophecy of Israel's rejection by the Lord of the Kingdom, so stands Israel herself, age after age, the open scorn of the world,—Judaism, a dead and fruitless religion, withered and spiritless. Wherever men look for truth, peace, consolation, or strength, it is never more to her. Men eat no fruit of that kind from her any more for ever. Yet there she stands, a monument of Divine judgment and of the unerring prevision of Him who thus foretold her doom, when reluctantly at last He found that she had rejected His grace.

The contrast between the idyllic opening of the miraculous ministry at the marriage in Cana and this stern and gloomy close of the Passion week is deeply suggestive. Thus the last of our Lord's Nature-signs during His earthly sojourn strangely links itself to the first. As the first rung in with joyful note the new Kingdom of God, and spoke, in language of symbol, of the abundant grace and truth which should flow out to men from its King and Lord, so does this last ring out with solemn tone the close of Israel's year of grace, and mark the passing over of the Kingdom's gifts and glory to the nations of men at large. Only one other symbolic picture, and that of the final and universal success of the Kingdom, remains to be considered, when we come to the closing scene of the post-resurrection days.

II.

THE HEALING-MIRACLES.

I.

THE COURTIER'S SON.

JOHN iv. 43-54.

THAT only a few of our Lord's mighty works are recorded at length is plain. The author of this Gospel assures us, with a burst of rhetoric in his concluding sentence, that an entirely detailed record of the works of Jesus would have been impossible. During the Lord's first public Jerusalem visit, we are here reminded, several miracles had been wrought, and believing effects had followed (cf. ii. 23). This, however, now to be related was the second of His Galilean miracles. And here a word is in place as to the principle on which the fourth Gospel arranges its miracle-histories. Reckoning the miracle of the Loaves and the Walking on the Water one continuous narrative, there are but seven of them in all. With the one exception just named, these are all peculiar to this Gospel. For throughout it presupposes a knowledge on the part of its readers of the Synoptic accounts, and is in relation to the miracles, as to all other facts of the life, mainly supplementary. These seven are, evidently, also selected—three from the Galilean ministry, three from the Jerusalem visits, and one after the

Resurrection. The selection has, in every instance, a doctrinal purpose. Besides the one before us, John records the Cana miracle, as the beginning of the manifestation of His glory; the Bethesda Healing (chap. v.), because of its double bearing on the Sabbath controversy and on the Lord's Divine Sonship; the miracle of the Loaves (chap. vi.), because of the sermon, Christ the Bread of Life,' immediately appended; the Cure of the Man Born Blind (chap. ix.), because of the argumentative demonstration of His Christhood which followed; the Raising of Lazarus (chap. xi.), as the crown of His mighty works, and as closely connected with His apprehension and crucifixion; the second Draught of Fishes (chap. xxi.), because of its prophetic bearing on the future of the Christian Church.

The historical importance of the present narrative lies in its record of a turning-point in the Lord's career. It is the introduction to the healing ministry in Galilee, and is therefore a fit supplement to the Synoptic records, which mainly report these healings. The practical or spiritual significance of the passage consists in showing that thus early in that healing ministry the Saviour emphasized the true connection between miracle and faith.

The relation of this narrative to the ministry of Jesus and its principal work-place is stated in vv. 43-7.

The reason given for the transference from Judea and Samaria to the northern province seems at first sight paradoxical, or reads as if it had got out of its proper place. There has been a great variety in the exegetical solutions proposed. To say that Jesus made this change because Judea, the country of His birth, because Jerusalem, the centre of the theocracy, had, on

the proverbial and well-known principle, rejected Him, gives a good sense. But the expression, "His own country," is never applied, in our Lord's case, to Judea or the capital, whereas it is three times applied in the Synoptics to a Galilean district.* Again, to make the Evangelist mean that Jesus went into Cana and Capernaum, but not to Nazareth and its neighbourhood, and so give the proverb its directest application, would no doubt express a good sense, but one to which nothing in the context leads up. The most helpful suggestion is that which would slightly transpose the place of ver. 44, so that the whole statement should run thus:—On His return to Galilee from the south, Jesus was received with a readiness denied Him in His earliest ministry even there. This change was occasioned by the impression made on those Galileans who had been visitors at Jerusalem during the Passover time, and had seen the works then wrought. What had not been done by His presence and words at home was now done even for His own countrymen by the report from a distance; so true is it, as He Himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country.

When under these new and more favourable circumstances Jesus returned to Galilee, He went at first to Cana, where His first miracle had been wrought. Thus He took up His Galilean work where He left it off, and thus was the connection resumed. St. John's reason for recording this second Cana incident, omitted by the other Evangelists, is plainly to account for the prominence which His healings in Galilee at once assumed. The courtier or nobleman of our story was a king's officer, or public functionary of the court of Herod

* Matt. xiii. 57; Mark vi. 4; Luke iv. 24.

Antipas.* Some think he was the steward Chuza, mentioned in Luke's Gospel, or the Manaen of Acts xiii., who was Herod's foster-brother. At all events, he was a person in such position that the event to be related, happening in his family, soon became widely and publicly known. When this man heard of Jesus' return to the province, he went at once from his own home in Capernaum to Cana, that he might bring the Healer to the bedside of his fevered boy. A previous acquaintance with the fame of Jesus is of course implied, and ver. 45 has suggested how it might have been gained. A certain degree of belief in Jesus and His power is also presupposed. The education of this elementary faith into full adherence to Jesus as the Christ is the spiritual thread of the story.

This is the first recorded of the Healing-miracles. It is the first occasion on which a cure was asked of Jesus. It is the first instance in which a conversation of the sort is detailed to us. In all these lights we are to mark how the Lord uses it to bring out the connection of the Healing-miracles with the faith of the receiver, and especially, in the case of healings obtained on suit, with the faith of the intercessor. Nothing in these narratives is more instructive than the glimpses they present of the grounds and character of faith. Their likenesses and difference, their parallels and contrasts, are full of interest. As varied and contrasted as were the states of mind and moods of faith in those with whom He dealt, so various and widely different were our Lord's ways of dealing with each. Now we see Him tenderly directing a weak faith. Anon, by

* Βασιλικός. "Royal" or "king's officer" is the designation most in favour with recent scholars, which R.V. puts in margin. The "courtier" of A.V. margin is more convenient.

apparent refusal, bringing out the strength of a strong faith; by hint or question giving all men to know that miracle is mainly useful, not as the ground, but as the reward of faith; that bodily healings are valued by Him chiefly as inlets to saving and spiritual health; that belief in Him as a healer of disease and a controller of nature is meant to lead on to faith in Him as the Son of God and Saviour of sinners. The aim of the conversation which follows was to indicate the grounds on which faith should rest, and the manner in which its growth may be strengthened. The intention of the record of it plainly is to suggest principles which ruled all our Lord's action and utterance during His healing ministry.

Ver. 48. "*Jesus therefore said unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders ye will in no wise believe*" (R.V.).* Our Lord had just come out of Samaria, where a great awakening had taken place without any miracles being seen at all, and just before that out of Judea, where, notwithstanding His many miracles, He had been virtually rejected. Further, this kindlier reception He was now obtaining in Galilee, had been indirectly occasioned by the Jerusalem-miracles. The impression of His life and character and words among Galileans from His childhood had not effected in long years what the report of these signs from a distance had produced in a few weeks. 'You Galileans,' says Jesus, speaking to the courtier, but through him to His countrymen, 'have received Me in so far as miraculous evidence has left you no choice, but your faith is still only of that weaker sort which leans on the crutch of sensible evidences.' These words cannot be fairly construed into a dis-

* To the usual word for miracle in this Gospel, *σημεῖα*, "signs," there is joined here the rarer word, *τέρατα*, "prodigies."

paragement of miracles on our Lord's part; that He wrought them unwillingly, or that He counted them of no value. The words in their connection are spoken with a corrective and educative purpose. They are intended to correct the unreasonable tendency of the human heart to demand a surfeit of external witness, to require a kind and amount of evidence for Divine facts that are inconsistent with the Divine methods and detrimental to the spiritual nature. When men have had sufficient evidence to accredit Divine communications, and still refuse to accept these, they violate a law of spiritual knowledge. When they demand additional, reiterated, and superfluous evidence, they are showing themselves not wise and cautious, but bigoted and unbelieving. Again, the saying is educative. Our Lord often points the contrast between the lower and the higher kinds of evidence and grounds of spiritual intercourse (cf. John xx. 29). Here He is leading on this father by his desires and by his affections to a higher and stronger faith than that which had brought him already to Jesus. He has taken this elementary faith in hand, and we shall see it mount to higher ground.

Ver. 49. "*The nobleman saith unto Him, Sir, come down ere my child die.*" The father comes out with a touching appeal for his son's life, with a simple expression of his own personal trust. His faith cannot be called clear or strong, but it is real. He still thinks Jesus must make the journey from inland Cana down to the Capernaum shore ere aught can be done. But necessity and love are handmaids of faith, and they are helpers of which Jesus ever gladly avails Himself. This man wants no signs and wonders, he says; he wants not even this healing as a wonder, but only for the saving of his child.

Ver. 50. "*Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son*

liveth. The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, and he went his way." The faith of the courtier has now a second test to undergo. The first lay in that word of ver. 48, apparently stern, which might have wounded his pride; but his persistent, affectionate prayer surmounted it. Now Christ honours his faith by putting it to the test of trusting His *word* without sign or wonder. He believed the word spoken to him, and acted on his belief by quietly taking his journey to Capernaum. It is not for us to pry into the *modus operandi* of a miracle. Yet this healing at a distance seems to transact itself before us, in the spiritual scene, as vividly as those in which Jesus stood over the patient and cured by sign and speech. We are permitted to perceive, as it were, the very moment when the cure was wrought. So soon as the Saviour's loving eye saw the spark of true faith leap out from this parent's anxious breast, He said to Himself, " Now My Father worketh, and I may work." A Divine drawing had brought the man to Jesus. The father had the child there in his heart. The Healer's hand lay, as it were, upon the lad. Distance was nothing, either to that parent's love or to Jesus' power. Jesus pauses to see if there be a heaven-sent faith in that heart; and the moment it reaches out in this cry, ' There is no other helper but Thou. Come down ere my child die,' the circle is complete. As the ray from Heaven illuminates the parent's heart, the ray of healing darts into his distant child, and the word of the Healer seals it: " Thy son liveth." No need for any Capernaum journey on His part. He said, and it was done. The healing beams of the Sun of Righteousness dispense benign influences from one end of the heavens to the other, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

Vv. 51-3. "*And as he was now going . . . him.*" It was one o'clock in the afternoon when the word was spoken. There is no need to interpose a whole day between this and the sequel of the story. There is no need for a third test of delay, invented by some of the commentators (as Meyer and Lampe). The explanation of the "yesterday," in ver. 52, is simple enough. The Jewish day, by which St. John reckons, ended at sunset. No doubt the courtier took his departure so soon as possible when his prayer was answered. The messengers were not despatched from Capernaum till perhaps some hours after the sudden cessation of the fever in the patient, *i.e.*, till it had become clear that he was cured. So the meeting described took place probably not far from Capernaum, and not long after sunset, when the words used would be appropriate enough. When the *cortège* was met, the father eagerly asked when the son began to amend.* They answered that it was not mere amendment, but instantaneous health; and this, in a case of fever, proved the preternatural element.† The fever had left him suddenly and entirely at the seventh hour on the previous day, *i.e.*, at the very hour when Jesus spoke the healing word. Thus was the faith which accepted a word without a sign confirmed by a sign unasked and unexpected. The delighted father not only received his son back from the dead, but "himself believed and his whole house." His

* Κομψότερον ἔσχε, "*did better*, or *more bravely*," some think a homely expression of the servants, but Godet says it suits well the mouth of a man of rank.

† "There is no professional cure of fever. All that physicians can do is to pilot the ship through the storm and obviate the tendency to death. The best that can be expected from the ablest physician is a long illness and a tardy convalescence."—Belcher's *Our Lord's Miracles of Healing*, p. 27.

faith was rewarded, sealed, and perfected, *i.e.*, they all became firm followers of Jesus as indeed the Christ.

Let us notice these results of the narrative:

1. *The Progress of Faith.* Faith, at first slender and tentative, becomes firm and influential. The process is worthy of notice. At first it rested on external testimony, but was backed by such anxiety to attain the object that the man came so far to seek it. Then its tenacity is proved and strengthened by a seeming rebuff. Another and great step is taken when Christ's word for the cure is accepted instead of His personal coming down. Next, it is crowned and perfected by the incontestable proof of the miracle. Last of all, it becomes fruitful in promoting like faith in others, "His whole house" went with him in the following of Christ. The process was one of reasonable assent at every step. Believe up to present evidence, according to present light, and then by so honouring God expect more evidence, fuller light, and stronger faith. What most of us need in our Christianity is not more evidence —the lamp can be choked with oil, if the oil is not used—it is to follow with entire cordiality the light that has shone so fully on us already.

2. *Christ's Evidential Method.* How He connects sign and spirit, miracle and faith. He deprecates the purely external connection—the believing only what is seen. Such demand for seen evidence ends usually in downright unbelief.* His method is to lead His disciples to such inward, spiritual acquaintance with and confidence in Himself that they trust His word, and so by-and-bye behold His work. When His trusting ones believe, then in due time they also see.† So was it

* John vi. 30 and 36.

† John xi. 40.

here. And the application of the method is instructive. In this case it seems almost paradoxical. It seems for a moment to forsake the evidential path. The courtier himself breaks off the argument with an appeal: "Come down ere my child die." Jesus accepts the loving earnestness and tenacity of a faith otherwise slender. He will lead this man into His Kingdom by the heart-strings, for He avails Himself of every access to the souls of men. This courtier would have Jesus go down and heal his son. Jesus healed his son and did not go down. Thus He suited His method to the case—was the helper of the father's faith as well as the healer of his son's malady. In this instance He did precisely the reverse of what He did to the centurion, though for the same ultimate end. By declining to go to this man's house He strengthened his faith; by offering to go to the centurion's house He brought out and honoured his humility. Finally, there is here established the principle of connection between miracle and faith which our Lord constantly insists on, and on which the whole healing ministry is a comment, namely, that miracle is not the ground of faith, but its reward. "He could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief." "Be it unto thee according to thy faith." So it is still; the inward and spiritual life is the precursor of the evident and outward triumphs of Christianity, and not the converse. Answers to prayer, successful labours, widespread victories for Christ's Kingdom—these are not the grounds of faith for those who get them. They come as rewards to those who have first believed and trusted Him from whom they come.

It is not needful to discuss at any length the attempts to identify this miracle with the Healing of the Cen-

turion's Servant recorded in two of the Synoptic Gospels. The differences are numerous and important. They are,—difference of place, this being wrought in Cana, that in Capernaum, though the persons concerned both belonged to the latter town ; of station, the king's officer (*βασιλικός*) has little or no affinity with the centurion (*ἑκατόνταρχος*) ; of nationality, the former in all probability a Jew, the latter certainly a Gentile ; in the relationship of the patient, here a son, there a servant, though a dear and familiar one ; of disease, in this case fever, in the other paralysis ; of historical connection in the narratives, this being immediately related to Jesus' return from the Samaritan sojourn, that being placed by Matthew and Luke in immediate sequence to the Sermon on the Mount. The inner differences are even greater. The slender and tentative faith of this man forms a contrast to the firm and great faith of the centurion, who is not worthy, he says, to have Jesus come under his roof; whereas this man's fixed idea at first was to bring the Saviour to the bedside of the patient. Indeed, a comparison of the two amounts to contrast, rather than rests in mere difference.

The resemblances are so slight and the differences so marked as to make it difficult to appreciate the grounds on which some commentators desire to identify them. Among the most recent, however, Beyschlag decides for non-identification against Weiss, and in the strongest terms. *

* *Das Leben Jesu*, W. Beyschlag, i. 255.

II.

THE DEMONIAC IN THE SYNAGOGUE.

MARK i. 21-8; LUKE iv. 31-7.

A CONTINUOUS account is given, at this point in these two Gospels, of the Lord's first Sabbath in Capernaum. The whole passage presents a remarkable view of His labours on one single day. In the earlier part of the day He goes to the synagogue, teaches with great impression, and deepens this still further by the first instance of His power over "the possessed." In the after part of the day He raises Simon's mother-in-law from her fevered bed to perfect health. Later on the same evening the afflicted people of the whole town are gathered round the door, and He heals them all. The night's rest which followed must have been of the briefest, for He rose the next morning long before day broke and retired into a solitary place for prayer. We are enabled by this minute and graphic narrative to follow His footsteps for nearly twenty-four consecutive hours, and thus obtain a vivid glimpse of his actual and active ministry.

In the first paragraph of this account we are called to note how Jesus made Himself Lord both of the synagogue and of the Sabbath. But lately we saw Him at week-day preaching and in open-air services.*

* See p. 51.

Now we see Him claiming the stated religious ordinances of the time for His Kingdom and its work. The number of His miracles done upon the Sabbath is quite a noticeable feature in these narratives, and became by-and-bye a main count in the indictment of His enemies against Him. In these Sabbath-healings He was preparing the way for what the Spirit of His gospel has effected, viz., the change of the observance from the secluded sanctity of the older into the merciful and benevolent activity of the newer dispensation. Not less noticeable is the diligence with which Jesus made use of the synagogue worship all through His Galilean ministry for the proclamation of His glad tidings, and in this He was closely followed by His apostles, as the Book of Acts bears witness on almost every page. Here, also, He was detaching the permanent element from the perishable in the ancient worship. The contrast between His treatment of the Temple and of the synagogue is significant. While He reverences the former, He speaks of it as about to vanish away. The latter He fosters, and by His labours and those of His servants moulds—as He did also the seventh-day rest—into a perpetual Christian institution. As we mark Jesus teaching and healing on the Sabbath day in the synagogues of Galilee, we shall learn that He is re-cuing and ripening that combination of sacred rest and religious instruction of which He found in these the germs. In short, we see Him preparing for all future ages the blessing of the Lord's day, as well as the worship and teaching of the Christian Church.

Let us now enter with Him and His little band of followers on this Sabbath morning into the house of prayer, perhaps the very one which the centurion proselyte had built for his townsfolks. It was probably

the Sabbath immediately following the call of Peter and his brethren to be "fishers of men." On this first visit He at once took up His position as a public religious Teacher. Thenceforward so to teach in these meetings on the sacred day became His recognised custom. From this first instance of it began also the astonishment of the people at His doctrine, or rather "at His teaching." Both the substance and the manner of His utterances impressed them; at the outset the latter especially. It was so different from that to which they had been used. Fresh, plain, and to the purpose, it was such a relief from the dry hair-splitting and traditionalism of their stated instructors, such a contrast to the glosses and guesswork of those so-called interpreters of the law. Most of all, it had a majesty and force which sprang from the Person of the Speaker, Himself the Truth. "*For He taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes.*" As He was teaching in this manner, the discourse was singularly interrupted. A voice burst out—a shriek rather than a voice—that stopped the Speaker and hushed the audience into death-like stillness. "*Let alone! Go away, Jesus of Nazareth! Art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God.*" * Unnoticed by those who had charge of the meeting, one of those unhappy creatures, "the possessed," had crept into the synagogue, and while our Lord was making His first fresh impressions on this rapt audience the Evil One tried to throw them into disorder, to break the spell of spiritual truth and power, to bring discredit on the Master's work as if He were the Author of confusion and excitement. But Jesus was not to be taken at unawares.

* The words are given with almost literal sameness in both Gospels.

"*Hold thy peace.*" He will have no testimony from such a quarter. We read in Mark's narrative (ver. 34), "He suffered not the demons to speak, because they knew Him." And again (at iii. 12), when they "fell down before Him and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God, He charged them much that they should not make Him known." So then, addressing the unclean spirit as distinct from the man, He added, "*Come out of him.*" This word was with power. It had authority like His teaching, in another and marvellous sense. For when the demon had thrown his victim into violent fits, had hurled him with a convulsive bound into the midst of the astonished congregation, and had uttered a cry of helpless rage, he came out and left the man prostrate but unhurt.

This is the first recorded of several similar incidents, the features of which are noticeably alike. It is needful once for all to enter into the question, What were these cases? How are we to regard our Lord's cures wrought upon them? Was He dealing in these simply with disease bodily, mental, or both, or with something worse than either? Was there a real or merely a figurative "casting out" of an unclean spirit in these healings?

As has been already noticed, the view most in favour at present is one which sees nothing in all these cases but lunacy, mania, epilepsy, and the like.* It therefore holds the narratives to be coloured by the prevalent notion of their age, which is said to have regarded all such ailments as the result of demoniacal possession. It ought to be remembered that many who take this view have no intention of thereby denying the reality or importance of the cures. That which they allow

* See Introduction, pp. 26-9.

would be still among the greatest of miracles, namely, that with a word Jesus should restore a furious maniac to sanity and calmness, or cure a confirmed case of nervous disorder, the most difficult of all forms of disease to deal with, as every physician knows. But the question is, in the first place, one of facts, and the theory now stated does not satisfy these. That the demoniacs of the New Testament include only the mentally or nervously afflicted, that all such were regarded by the writers as possessed, are both assumptions unsupported by the sources. It is tolerably plain,—

a. That by the Gospel-writers themselves a distinction is made between demoniacal possession and mental or nervous disease. In Matt. iv. 24 we read, among our Lord's healings, of "those which were possessed with devils, those which were lunatic (epileptic, R.V.), and those that had the palsy." * In this first chapter of Mark (ver. 34) it is said, "He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils." The same distinction is made in the corresponding place of the third Gospel (Luke iv. 40, 41), while in another (vii. 21) infirmities, plagues, and evil spirits are enumerated.†

b. It is also clear that by the Evangelists some nervous disorders are regarded as natural, while other cases of the same disorders are spoken of as aggravated by possession. Compare, for example, the case of a man naturally deaf and dumb (Mark vii. 32) with that of one described as dumb by reason of an evil spirit

* Δαιμονιζομένους, καὶ σεληνιαζομένους, καὶ παραλυτικούς.

† Νόσων καὶ μαστίγων καὶ πνευμάτων πονηρῶν. It is surely worth notice that it is the physician-evangelist who records the largest number of these (five out of the seven) as cases, plainly, of possession.

(Matt. ix. 32), or of one blind and dumb for a similar reason (Matt. xii. 22). The man whose cure is recorded in John v. had a natural impotence, not unconnected certainly with personal sin; yet a similar infirmity recorded in Luke xiii., where the moral character of the patient is conspicuously not in question, is ascribed to Satanic oppression. It cannot therefore, upon a fair reading of the Gospels, be alleged that all such disorders were, in those times, or by the Gospel-writers, attributed to evil spirits.

c. Further, what is still more formidable to this theory is the language of Jesus, both in performing these miracles and in discoursing of them. He addresses the unclean spirit, commands it to come out of the man, speaks of it as distinct from the patient himself. To the disciples by themselves He specifies a "kind which cometh not forth but by prayer and fasting." Above all, there are the passages where, both in defending His own cures of this class and in congratulating His disciples on theirs, He declares them to be real victories over Satanic power.* To suppose Him to speak in accordance with an insane idea of the victims themselves, or to favour the superstitious notion of the age, if, after all, the thing done was the removal of a mental or nervous disorder only, is to adopt an interpretation which, to say the least of it, brings the Saviour's truthfulness into serious hazard. On the other hand, we must repudiate the view of Olshausen and Weiss, who would maintain the accuracy of the language used, by regarding the patients, in these cases, as persons of preternatural wickedness,—so given over to certain sins and morally under the power of Satan, that they could truthfully be spoken of as possessed. It is certainly

* Matt. xii. 25-9; Luke x. 17-20, xi. 17-22.

of a very different class of persons from the demoniacs that it is said, Satan had entered into them, or that they belonged to the Father of lies. The attempt to identify this with the language used about possession is futile.

d. Once more, when we take in all the facts we must not overlook the physical and psychical elements in "possession," because we are compelled to think that there was also something beyond or below the natural. Doubtless the two men in the tombs at Gadara were maniacs. The man here who cried out in the synagogue was insane, and so of the many similar cases alluded to in the mass, though not detailed. But they were something more or worse, for this plain reason over and above those already given, that they took the opportunity whenever they saw Jesus, of declaring Him to be the Son of God.* If these were only poor maniacs and lunatics, how did they discover and proclaim what was hid as yet from all the rest of the Jewish nation? It is vain to say that the awakening hope of Messiah found expression through these diseased minds, when the invocation occurred, as in this instance, upon our Lord's first public appearance in Capernaum, or as in that other was actually uttered by the maniac on the eastern shore, shut out from every kind of human companionship, and to whom the Person of Jesus was presumably unknown. It is worse than vain to say, that when He began to be thought of as the Christ, the first so to recognise Him should be those diseased in their minds. When did insanity or epilepsy render a soul more susceptible to receive a spiritual impression or reveal the Christ of God to the heart? What is plainly recorded in the present case was something more than

* Besides the two specified instances, cf. the general statement, Mark i. 34; Luke iv. 41.

a mental malady, viz., a preternatural or infernal oppression of the man's personality; in the exact words of the narrative, that the man "had the spirit of an unclean demon," or "was in an unclean spirit." Cf. Mark i. 23 and Luke iv. 33.

Let us consider the authority and value of this miracle occurring as it does at the opening of the Galilean ministry. Take the words of the amazed congregation in the synagogue as an expression of these. "*What is this? a new teaching! with authority He commandeth even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.*" * How clearly this brings out the connection between miracle and doctrine. The human mind in its inquiries demands such a connection.† Here is power; but to what does the power witness? It must never be forgotten that the value of our Lord's miracles as evidence does not depend on their being mere acts of power. If we put ourselves in the position of accepting mere wonder as evidence of the Divine, we lay ourselves open to become the prey of Antichrist, for Scripture tells us that "His coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." ‡ What word then, what teaching is this which is attended with such power? His teaching is that the kingdom of God is come near to men, for He that teaches is the Saviour of the world. His name is Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins. He "was manifested" to take sin away and at

* Mark i. 27, R.V. That is, attention was fixed on the new method of Jesus with demoniacs: cure by a word and not by the arts of the exorcist.

† "Miracle is the sign and seal of doctrine. But as the seal torn from the deed or writing to which it was affixed proves nothing, so miracles are of no force apart from doctrine."—J. Gerhard.

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 9.

last abolish its effects. Compare with this claim, these signs following. If we ask what are the physical effects of sin, it is answered: sicknesses of all kinds; fevers, palsies, leprosies, blindness,—each of these a death begun—a partial dying; and finally death itself, "the wages of sin." Now as we follow Jesus through His Galilean ministry will there be any need to question what word, what new doctrine, or what kind of Person is here? We can say as He said to John's messengers, "The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and to the poor the gospel is preached." Is this any other than He who was sent of God to be the Saviour of the world? These miracles of healing are the appropriate signs and seals of the glad tidings of salvation—as redemption-miracles they are the true credentials of a Divine Redeemer.

But this argument goes a step higher. If we ask ourselves what are the mental and psychical effects of sin—we answer, those moral disorders, those fearful infirmities in which mind and body both seem to be involved, when the gates of the human soul seem to stand ajar so that an evil spirit may enter and take possession; and towards all such cases our Lord manifested the utmost tenderness and promptness of cure. Those actually tormented by unclean demons were special objects of His miraculous power. Indeed He seems to begin thus early in His merciful ministry with one of these, in order to bring this argument for His Divine authority and Christly office to the test. What power is this, that commandeth even the unclean spirits and they do obey Him? Can we hesitate a moment to answer. What power, but that which was manifested to destroy such works. Vainly will

the cavillers at this same class of miracles try to say that it is by Beelzebub He casts out demons. The answer is ready. What power is this? No power of nature. It is above and beyond nature. No power infernal; a house divided against itself cannot stand. It is the Son of God that was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. If anything else were wanting to crown the proof it would be this—the unclean spirits obey Him, because they recognise Him. His is a power to which they cannot choose but yield. He is One they cannot choose but know. Repressed and confused by His presence, they shriek out in blind terror the proof of His divinity. This blessed One entering our sin-stained world, and on behalf of miserable man throwing down His challenge to the powers of darkness, is to them no unknown Champion. They flee from Him, proclaiming in their flight who and whence He is. "Earth has not yet recognised her King, has not yet perceived Him under His disguise; but heaven and hell alike bear witness to Him; the devils also believe and tremble." *

* Trench, *in loc.*

III.

SIMON'S WIFE'S MOTHER: A SABBATH-DAY'S LABOURS.

MATT. viii. 14-17; MARK i. 29-34; LUKE iv. 38-41.

THIS narrative stands in the closest possible connection with what precedes. Mark and Luke both tell us that immediately after Jesus and His company rose from the synagogue worship where the demoniac had been healed, and came into the house, the case of Simon's mother-in-law was brought under His notice, and then that this led to a remarkable gathering of sick persons that same evening, when He healed "every one of them." The passage claims distinct comment because it brings before us not so much a particular incident as a whole mass of His healing labours, and these taking place on one single Sabbath-day.

1. *The Fever rebuked.* It was in the "*House of Simon and Andrew.*" They were of Bethsaida, but had now a home in Capernaum. Perhaps they had removed thither in order the better to suit their attendance on Jesus and His ministry. The fact that these disciples had a home, that they lived in family relations, that their house was open for Jesus and His following, that the table was spread there on the Sabbath, after the synagogue-meeting—all this gives a glimpse of a simple, natural, religious life. It is related in immediate context that Simon, Andrew and the others "forsook

all and followed Jesus."* Probably nine readers out of ten, when the sentence occurs about "leaving all and following Jesus," frame to themselves an idea, coloured by the mediæval conception of renouncing the world, forsaking the natural duties of life and abjuring common sense. Yet here on the same page we can behold the actual scene. These fisherman, just as before, kept home and friends and table, and provided as God helped them "things honest in the sight of all men;" all the more carefully too that they were doing it now, not for their own comfort and support only, but for Jesus and His Gospel.

When they entered the house they found Peter's mother-in-law "*laid and sick of a fever*," *i.e.*, struck down or prostrate with fever, and St. Luke adds the technical detail that it was a "great fever"† with which she was "holden" (R.V.). "*Anon*" they tell Him of her, "*They besought Him for her.*" At once He attended to the case.‡ "*He touched her hand*" (Matt.); "*took her by the hand and lifted her up*" (Mark); "*stood over her, and rebuked the fever* (Luke), *and immediately she arose, and ministered unto them.*"

* Luke v. 11, where this expression follows our present story. Cf. Mark i. 20, where it almost immediately precedes.

† Πυρετῷ μεγάλῳ. Most careful commentators refer to the language of Galen and other ancient physicians as distinguishing fevers by the terms μέγας and μικρός. The expression "*holden* (συνεχομένη) of a fever" is again used by St. Luke in Acts xxviii. 8, and is also the proper medical or technical expression. For much elaborate information on these points see *The Medical Language of St. Luke*, Rev. W. K. Hobart, LL.D., Dublin, 1882; also Belcher, *Our Lord's Miracles of Healing*, p. 20, etc.

‡ St. Mark's use of εὐθέως is notable in this place, ver. 29, "*Forthwith* they entered into the house;" ver. 30, "*Anon* they tell Him of her;" ver. 31, "*Immediately* the fever left her,"—the same adverb in all three verses.

The noticeable features of the transaction are these: (1) That this healing was done at the request of those around Him. Jesus sought out many cases Himself, and healed them unasked. Here He gives examples numberless of the converse—for this was only the first of a whole crowd of such answered requests that afternoon and evening,—direct seals of His own maxim, "Ask, and ye shall receive." Ask not only for yourselves, but for others. "Ask believing, and it shall be done unto you." (2) The specific action with which the cure was accompanied. The "laying His hands" upon the patients. This action seems to have characterised the whole group of Healings which took place on this occasion, for St. Luke says of this great transaction, that "He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them" (Luke iv. 40). The action, though not invariable, was a very frequent one with Him. We may read it as giving a sacramental character to these Healings.* It was significant that the Sent of God and the Saviour of men should use such an action. It means that He comes to reverse the curse of disease and suffering, as to remove the sin which brought it. That He absolves from the guilty the yoke of sin and restores men to the favour of God. (3) The immediate and entire recovery of the patient. In addition to the statement common to all the Synoptic Gospels, that the completeness of the recovery was proved by the good dame's prompt help at the table, St. Luke records the "rebuke" of the fever—a detail which would strike the mind of a physician. The transaction is utterly

* It has been noted that a visible sign of some sort was used by Jesus in twenty-two out of the thirty-three of His miracles. And that though He laid His hand upon lepers even—He never did so to demoniacs.

removed by these details out of the category of an ordinary event. There are sudden cessations of febrile attack, but they leave the patient prostrate. At the best, riddance of fever is usually followed by a long and slow convalescence. Here was something entirely different.* How great was the impression made by this instantaneous cure of an acute malady, the immediate sequel showed.

We can see the appropriateness of this work, in the circumstances of the case. It would have been strange indeed, if Jesus had not used His healing power on the occasion. Often in the public view and on far-carried patients He exerted His merciful gift. How natural this "home-specimen," as Calvin calls it, of His grace. Here was His disciple's near relation, His own hostess, struck down with sickness. It was most fitting that He should bring with Him the joy of immediate relief and dispel the shadow that darkened His temporary home.

2. *The Evening's Work.* The miracles of the day soon spread their report through the place, and before nightfall the whole city "was gathered together at the door." Those who had heard of the forenoon miracle brought all the possessed persons they could get, and He "cast out devils," not suffering them to speak. That is to say, as much as possible He repressed those demonstrations of which a notable specimen had occurred in the synagogue. The testimony was not such as He desired. It was premature and unsuitable. As Matthew Henry quaintly says, It was extorted in the process of expulsion, and being a confession made upon the rack, it was not admitted in evidence. Again, the miracle of the afternoon—sudden and entire removal of

* Comp. *note* at p. 142 *supra.*

fever—suggested that His help was available for other forms of illness. Fevers are among the most common and fatal of acute diseases, and if He could cure them with a word, why not other sicknesses, and indeed every sort of disease and infirmity? Forthwith the entire ailing persons of the town were brought to Him. They waited indeed until sunset, for then the Sabbath was over, and they could with a freer conscience set about what they deemed the un-Sabbatic labour of carrying sick people. Jesus did not agree with them in that opinion, and soon found occasion, in the course of His Healing ministry, to show that He did not. But He respected their scruples, and though the Sabbath was now passed and He might have claimed the evening's rest, He did not so. He began afresh, and carried on probably late into the night His toilsome work. So great was the crowd and so numerous the cases, that it was impossible to bring them one by one into the house. They were gathered together before it. He went on casting out devils, healing the sick, laying His hands upon them, without exception and without restriction, until it could be literally said that "He healed them all."

It is at this point and on this eminent occasion of His scattering broadcast over a whole community these gracious benefits so worthy of the Redeemer of mankind, that St. Matthew cites the well-known words from Isaiah's great Messianic Passional as being there and then fulfilled, "*Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.*" The inspired insight implied in the quotation grows upon us as we reflect upon it. It is the very word required to elevate this whole mass of miraculous detail into a universal human connection, to place it in the central light of the Redeemer's Person

and Work. Not indeed that the meaning lies on the surface. It is at first blush paradoxical to quote words which seem to express, not what the recovered crowds and their friends were enjoying, but what the Healer Himself was undertaking. But note the occasion. Not without significance are these words quoted in connection with this remarkable Sabbath day's work. From morning to evening, and beyond evening into night, had Jesus been curing diseases—bodily, mental and spiritual. He was doubtless much fatigued. Much virtue had gone out of Him. Much compassion had been excited within Him. He had many harrowing cases of possession to deal with. Many sore distresses had been subjected to His view. True, He had been victorious over them all. It was a day of gladness in that place such as had never been seen since it was a place of human habitation, and doubtless the soul of Immanuel rejoiced in this outpouring of God-like help. But this well-chosen citation directs our attention to some other aspects of the Lord's Healing offices. Think of the Son of God, the Eternal King of a city where no inhabitant can ever say, "I am sick," now sojourning among suffering men. See what work ready for Him, what evils to grapple with in one little town of one obscure province of this dark earth, on one Sabbath afternoon. Then, think of His three years' ministry, day after day healing, helping, suffering with and for men. Think, further, of the tremendous mass of human misery which Jesus Christ, through His blessed Gospel, has come to remove; of the weight of His glorious but mighty undertaking, as it lay upon His mind during that compassionate, open-eyed, public life of His in Judæa and Galilee. Think, finally, of the innumerable evils of humanity meeting upon Him—Him alone—who

was to redeem us from them, and the force of the words will make itself felt.

It is a further surprise, leading to a further expansion in the sense of this great utterance, to note that the words "*took*" and "*bare*" will not admit of being rendered "took away" or "bore off." They are the proper terms for representative, place-taking, substitutionary suffering. Scholarship admits no other rendering of them. Now, at first sight, or on a superficial view, it does seem strange to say that Jesus "bare" or "carried," like a surety or substitute, men's sicknesses and infirmities when, in point of fact, He was sympathizing with them, or, better still, was relieving and removing them. But the truth is, in a great deal of our Christian teaching, the central doctrine of Atonement has been shrivelled up to a mere test-point of orthodoxy, instead of taking on the breadth of the Scriptures. Is not this quotation of the Evangelist a fresh light thrown on the vicarious work of Jesus? Not His death alone bare that character, but His life as well. The same redeeming energy was shown in these blessed Healings as when in the latest and highest phase of it, He, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot unto God.* And the connection of the two sides of this great redemptive work becomes clear when we read the Scriptures in their own light. Accept the doctrinal standpoint of the sacred writers, and the whole becomes clear as a sunbeam. Suffering and disease are effects of sin and types of sin. The removal of disease, then, is an effect and a symbol of the removal of sin itself. And He who takes away the sin of the world is He who takes it upon Himself in life and death. As Jesus

* See some good notes on "The Gospel of the Miracles," G. G. Findlay, *The Monthly Interpreter*, September, 1886.

wrought these mighty and merciful works throughout the towns and villages of Galilee, He was showing Himself by type and foretaste the suffering yet conquering Redeemer upon whom the Lord has laid that iniquity of US ALL from which all our pains and diseases flow.* This central thought brings the diseases and sufferings of the children of God in every age within the sweep of that Healing ministry of Jesus. There is more in this one line of the Gospel to support suffering Christians than in all the writings of the philosophers. It is not that the merciful Son of man relieved a certain limited amount of human pain and misery in a small area of the earth during the few years of His public ministry. If that were all, the record of the Healing miracles might have to be regarded as an aggravation rather than a consolation to suffering mankind. But let faith grasp the fact. Let God's word interpret it to our hearts and minds. Let us see in the Healer of Galilee, the Lamb of God and the Redeemer of the world. Let us think of Him as doing by forecast, and in some special instances, with His loving touch on those sick multitudes, what He is doing for the entire body of His redeemed as He works out their redemption. He "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree," in the same great act "took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." He took the cause and the sting of them upon Himself. And in the gracious communication of His healing and saving might to His redeemed, He broadens out the miracles of Capernaum to cover our entire Christian experience. Sicknesses and infirmities are to His children no longer of the

* "Unus homo corpore et anima constat. Una animæ et corporis corruptela. Unam utrique opem, ut res ferebat, hic Medicus præstitit" (Bengel, *in loc.*).

curse, but within the covenant. He bore them for us in His passion; He bears them with us in His compassion. He can be touched with a feeling of them all. He touches them with the transmuting power of His love, and so makes them "light afflictions which are but for a moment, working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

IV.

THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER.

MATT. viii. 2-4; MARK i. 38-45; LUKE v. 12-16.

THE popular exposition of this and of the other Leper-narratives of the Bible has become vitiated by some confusions which ought to be cleared up. In the first place, the best experts now insist on distinguishing the Leprosy of Scripture, or of the Hebrews, from the so-called "true Leprosy" of mediæval and modern times. This disease is one of the most formidable and hopeless of known maladies, and finds its nearest analogue in scrofula or syphilis. It is irremediable by any known human means. Though not directly contagious, there is always the terrible risk to those who mingle much with the sufferers of at last falling under its power. This was the malady known from an early period of European civilization, for which the Lazarettos or Lazar-houses of the Middle Ages were provided. The attention of Christian philanthropy at the present day has been roused to the aid of those who are attempting, in India, in the South Seas, and in other localities where it still prevails, to stamp it out by isolation; and spiritual ministrations have for years been supplied to these isolated sufferers with a chivalry as high as the spirit of Jesus has inspired in any age. On the other hand, every probability,

derived from the terms used in Scripture and in ancient medicine, from the very full description of its symptoms in the Old Testament, and from the whole strain of the narratives in which it occurs in the sacred text, goes to show that the Leprosy there meant is a totally different malady. It was a skin disease of various and complicated forms, some of which may have had a resemblance to the symptoms of the modern terror. It was of repulsive aspect, indeed, but neither usually fatal nor absolutely irrecoverable. Whether the Hebrew Leprosy was always or ever contagious, is the second point of confusion which ought to be cleared. But here the true solution is not so evident. It involves the allied question, whether the Mosaic rules for its segregation were sanitary only, or were in no respect so, but only symbolic and religious. The truth seems to lie between the two. There is no need for the antithesis. There is fair ground for concluding that this leprosy was not necessarily infectious by contact; but that it was contagious in the wider sense of being communicable by social or family interchange; also that other similar diseases really infectious were not easy to distinguish from it. The Hebrew legislation, therefore, justifies itself at once on sanitary and on ceremonial grounds.*

The use of Leprosy as a type for sin is quite legitimate, but the analogy requires to be handled with greater accuracy and point than is usually applied to it. The usage in the Christian pulpit and commentary dates from the Fathers themselves, who no doubt had the proper Hebrew Leprosy in view. But most theological

* See for the full discussion of this subject: Sir Risdon Bennet, M.D., etc., *op. cit.*, pp. 15-53; Belcher, *do.*, pp. 81-105; Dr. Greenhill, in *Bible Educator*, iv., pp. 76-8; Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, i., 491-6.

or religious teaching on the topic has been coloured by the impression of "the deep-seated, all-pervading, corrupting, and mortal character of mediæval leprosy, rather than from anything said in the Bible."* Yet the figure presented in the Hebrew Leprosy is full of significance, full of that peculiar aptness which marks the emblems of Scripture when truthfully interpreted. All diseases, especially those which Jesus healed, have their symbolic side, as has been already remarked,† but Divine legislation itself emphasized the specialties of this one. There was, (*a*) its *repulsiveness.* We naturally shrink from skin diseases. In these maladies the bodily mischief is, so to say, *en evidence.* The instinct of all healthy life is revolted by it. So, could we see our own sinful nature and life as these appear in the sight of holy beings, above all of the Holiest, we should be appalled at its loathsomeness. Then (*b*) the suggestion of *impurity* or *defilement* in Leprosy is most patent. The appropriate and almost invariable word for its removal is "cleansing" in the narratives of our Lord's cures. The same word is significantly used in His commission to His disciples: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils" (Matt. x. 8). Thus is Leprosy distinguished from other forms of human ill. A saying is quoted from Augustine to the effect that when Lepers were restored to health they were *mundati*, not *sanati*, because Leprosy is an ailment affecting merely the colour, not the health or soundness of the senses and the limbs. This is undoubtedly an exaggeration, but it serves to bring us back to the true state of the question. It is upon its uncleanness that the emphasis of the Bible

* Sir R. Bennet, at p. 47.

† See Introduction, p. 24.

representations of Leprosy depend. And this leads to the kindred idea of (*c*) *isolation* or *separation*—an idea burned into the Hebrew mind by the sacred legislation. The Leper was treated by the Mosaic law as cut off from the living. He was to be shunned, as the same law required its subjects to shun all defilement by the touch of the dead. On its removal the same offerings and lustrations were appointed as for those who had defiled themselves for the departed.

Here, then, is a sufficiently expressive symbolism. Sin, like Leprosy, is hideous in the sight of all pure beings—it covers the soul, as that covers the body, with a universal taint of impurity. It is incurable by any ordinary human appliances. It separates from the camp of God's Israel, because it cuts off from the fellowship of God. The dead in trespasses and sins have no place in the true Church of the living God. It is discovered by the law, but it is taken away only by the Son, who was manifest to do that which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh.

Let us now look at (1) this particular instance of Leprosy, and (2) at our Lord's method of dealing with it.

1. The incident happened in one of the Galilean tours. Matthew relates it as occurring when Jesus came down from the Mount of Beatitudes. We should have looked for it as likely to take place on a country road, or at least outside the gates of a town; but Luke says it was when "He was in one of their cities," while Mark places it in the preaching tour through the neighbouring "towns," following on the Capernaum cures already narrated. Attention is at once arrested by the Leper's Faith. This is the first instance in which we are called specially to note that element. The cure of a

fever patient, or of a demoniac, must take place with no reference to the sufferer's state of mind. Friends, in some of these cases, brought the patients and showed faith in the Healer. Now one comes of his own motion, declaring his own confidence in the Saviour. From this point onwards the narratives are rich with references to the link between personal faith and the desired healing. This man's faith is shown by his immediate and earnest application, "*He came to Jesus, beseeching Him,*" and his rendering to Jesus something like Divine honours, "*Kneeling down to Him, he worshipped Him.*" Still more distinctly does the character of his faith come out in his words, made emphatic by their exact reproduction in all three Gospels: "*Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean.*" This faith was *original.* There had been no previous instance, amid all the Judean and Galilean healings, of such a cure. No wonder, for lepers dwelt by themselves; were indeed regarded more as outcasts than as sufferers. Nobody thought of them, or of bringing them to Jesus. They were least likely to see or even hear of Him; but the great and spreading fame of the Healer had reached this poor outcast, and, reasoning justly upon the facts, he told himself that One mighty enough to do all these other wonders, could no doubt remove Leprosy. And it was *courageous.* For this was no slight form of the malady. St. Luke notes that this man was "full of leprosy." The disease was virulent and total. The patient honoured Jesus, therefore, in taking to Him such a case and in such a spirit. 'Bad as my ailment is, beyond human help and hope, I come to Jesus with more than hope, with assurance of His ability.' But what of this "*if Thou wilt.*" Usually it is assumed that here was a defect in the man's faith. It is, at

least, as probable that it shows his entire and implicit trust. Jesus had made no announcement that he would heal every case or kind of disease,—though the facts had already witnessed that He could, and in all probability would, heal all who applied to Him. Still it had been made clear that He would work no miracles upon compulsion, nor even upon mere solicitation. When His townsfolk of Nazareth demanded of Him, with an insulting unbelief, that He would do at home what He had done abroad, He reminded them that like deeds of love and mercy had been done in times of old, not according to the caprice or the wishes of men, but according to the Divine counsel. The cure of a leper was one of the instances He quoted. "There were many lepers in Israel," he said, in the days of Elisha, but it was not one of his countrymen the prophet healed by the power and will of Jehovah, "None of them was cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian."* One could almost suppose this leper had got some rumour of that speech. He had somehow conceived that view of Christ's Divine commission which it presents; for he says, in effect, "I know not whether it is the purpose of God that under Thy mission any lepers should be cleansed. Of the power of God in Thee to do it, I have no doubt, for it is mightily witnessed; and as for the intention, I cast myself on Thy Godlike heart; If Thou wilt, Thou canst."

In most of these particulars, this man's faith is a model for us of the faith which saves. We have not, indeed, his difficulty to overcome. We know it is our Lord's intention to save sinners. We know it from the proclamation; every line and letter of the Gospel assures us of His willingness. We know it from the

* Luke iv. 27.

facts. None who came to Him as a Saviour was ever cast out. Let us see that we grasp firmly His power and willingness to save sinners still. "Thou *canst* make me clean." It is no small part of faith to own and honour His authority and power. "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" "That ye may know that the Son of man hath power (ἐξουσίαν, right, authority) on earth to forgive sins." Many think it a matter of course that they believe His power to save them when they shall apply to Him. Their easy assent rises from a slight view of the cure to be wrought. It is another thing to come to Him with confidence, under the clear conviction that one is "full of the leprosy" of sin. Yet how many are there, pining under inward pollution, groaning under fetters of habitual vice, wandering about without spiritual health and cure, saying, in effect, there is no hope! It is indeed the heart of faith to go to Him with earnest beseeching and with reliance on His might—'Thou art able—Thou alone—to save me.'

"*If* Thou wilt." We abolish the "if." Of His willingness there can be, dare be, no question. "God will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." The declared will of God is a ground of acceptance and access to salvation for all. 'But the glad tidings are not yet accessible to all.' 'Many to whom they are familiar are not saved.' Yes, to every thoughtful mind there is mystery surrounding this subject of the Divine intention as to men's final fate. But what we may learn here is, how a believing mind ought to deal with that mystery. It should afford another occasion of honouring and trusting the Christ of God. Let us take this problem, this harmonizing of Divine power and Divine intention, as one wrapped up in God's great gift of Christ to men, and bring it for

solution, not to a doctrinal formula, not even to the form of sound words—far less to the babble of human speculation, but to the Wonderful Counsellor Himself. 'Blessed Christ, Thou hast power to save whom Thou wilt; and by Thine own word it is made clear that Thy will and power combine to save us. "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." Thou wilt, Thou canst make us clean.'

2. St. Mark alone has the significant words, "*And Jesus, moved with compassion.*" We can see what an appeal there was to the Saviour-heart of Jesus in the case of such a man. There was shame and disgrace involved in the disease. There was isolation and repulsion. Sick and troubled persons usually draw men's sympathies, and are cared for by their fellow-men above others on account of their sufferings. With lepers it was precisely the reverse. If the leper went into a synagogue, a vacant space was made round him. If he walked abroad he went with dishevelled hair, with his mouth covered, and crying out Unclean, unclean, lest any one should touch him. He was shunned, not pitied, and if people had thought of this man at all, they would have tried to keep him out of the Saviour's way rather than bring him near it.*

How exactly here again our Lord's healing mercy is dispensed so as to meet the case, so as to heal heart and soul and body all in one, Word and act, both significantly recorded by all the three Evangelists; show us how He did it. He "*put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean.*" The act before the word. This was His immediate answer to the leper's "if." The doubt in the sufferer's mind was

* See the vivid contrast between the Rabbinic treatment of lepers and that adopted by Jesus (Edersheim, *loc. cit.*).

mainly whether Jesus would have anything to do with outcasts from the Church and commonwealth of Israel, and this was His reply. He did not always touch even the lepers when He healed them, as we see from the other Leper-story in Luke xvii. But here, in the first instance, the act was most significant. That touch was everything to the lonely outcast. It swept the barrier down that held him aloof from mankind. Every looker-on shrunk back for fear of defilement. All held their breath at the unwonted boldness of the act. But the outstretched hand of the Son of man was laid with fearless and loving clasp on the unclean. We may think the word had been enough without the touch. In many of His cures He used the word alone. But here the act was the very heart of the transaction; for above all others a leper needed the touch of brotherhood and health. And this act reflected—how simply, yet grandly—the power as well as the grace of Jesus. He touched the polluted and took no pollution. He was the pure One to whom all things are pure. For any other the touch would have been defilement. But in Him purity swept away uncleanness, life banished death. The creative health of the Redeemer abolishes by its first contact the loathsome disease of the sinner. Then the word; how apt! "I will;" exactly it meets and yet overpasses the leper's prayer. That had been couched in a simple human appeal to the Healer's power, and with a modest submission to His will. The royal word of the Redeemer leaps out in reply. If there were an incompleteness in the faith which prompted the prayer, it was swallowed up in the completeness of the answer. 'Thou hast honoured the power; sure of the "*canst*," be assured also of the "*wilt*." To him that hath shall be given, and he shall

have more abundance.' How kingly is Christ's giving. He will have faith from those He blesses. He honours faith as faith honours Him,—the more faith, the larger blessing. But He drives no bargain about its degree or kind. It is simply that He be trusted. Only believe! All things are possible to him that believeth! "*As soon as He had spoken.*" He spake and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast. "*Immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.*"

Two things in the sequel deserve special attention. The Saviour's injunction and the man's disregard of it.

(1) The charge was twofold—to keep silence and to go to the priest. The injunction, "*See thou say nothing to any man,*" was not unusual with Jesus in His Healing-miracles. The reasons for it might lie partly in the circumstances of the Master Himself. Much noise about the cure hindered His work; and in this case it proved so according to St. Mark's pointed detail in ver. 45. Yet it could not be absolute concealment of the healing that the Lord intended to enjoin in this case, for it was performed in public before a multitude of people (cf. Matt. viii. 2). Rather, then, the other reason for the commanded silence must be supposed the stronger one here, viz., that which concerned the moral effect upon the subject of the cure. The disposition of the man was evidently such that silence, for a time at least, was a needful discipline. But the second part of the charge, "*Go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer . . . for a testimony unto them,*" throws the clearest light upon the Saviour's intention. His immediate and almost forcible discharge of the man from the spot emphasizes the whole: "*He strictly* (*m.* sternly) *charged him, and straightway sent him*

out" (Mark i. 43, R.V.). It has all the effect of a paradox. The blessing hand, a moment before stretched out to the unclean, now thrusts him away when he is cleansed. He who let a leper, of all men, draw near, sends him from His presence when he is a leper no more. This brings again into full view the precise religious significance of leprosy and its cure. Leprosy was a social and spiritual ban, even more than it was a disease. Set free from the disease, this man must at once be also set free from the curse and isolation which his disease entailed. That the Lord held this essential to such cases is proved by the uniformity of His procedure (cf. the narrative of Luke xvii.). This miracle must have for the Worker its proper attestation, and for the subject its due legal, social, and religious fruits. These could only be attained in the way here so pointedly prescribed, by recourse to those in charge of the sacred legislation. That Jesus was mainly anxious to forestall prejudice to His own work, by getting the priests at once to countersign the cure, is not thinkable. It would be altogether unlike Him. Yet it is not unfitting to suppose Him desirous of having the work attested by a due observance of the Mosaic law, and of thus having its validity carried home to the minds of all, and especially of those who administered the law.* But the main design, doubtless, of this immediate despatch to the priest was to complete the benefit for the man himself. He was really not cured in the highest sense till he was socially and spiritually restored to the commonwealth of Israel,

* Despite the preponderance of authorities against it, I have never been able to see that the words "for a testimony unto them" need be construed otherwise than as epexegetic of the words, "Moses commanded," *i.e.*, the Mosaic legislation was on this point one of moral and religious significance.

and that by obedience to the Divine requirements. So let all our spiritual work and the marvels of God's grace among us be brought to the test of the Divine precept, to the law and to the testimony. That these are really Divine works will be incontestably proved only by that criterion; not by premature noising of them abroad, not by crude and immature display of them, but by the countersign of God's own witness in heart and life. Leprosy was a vivid type of sin, in the social death which it entailed. The means appointed for its ceremonial cleansing were emblematic of a restoration which goes to the very heart of the spiritual life. To honour these as Jesus here did was to set forth a deep truth of His salvation. His pardon, His pronouncement that the soul is clean, carries with it that complete removal of sin's pollution and power which the pure and impartial judgment of God's law must attest. "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; yea, wash Thou me and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free spirit."

(2) The man apparently broke both the injunctions laid upon him. He did not go to the priest, and he did not keep silence. The result was a temporary injury, at least, if not more, to the Healer's work. The cleansed leper was probably what we call a well-meaning man. He thought he knew a better way to honour Jesus and promote His cause than that which Jesus Himself prescribed, and the sequel is significant. It is perhaps not too much to say that the blunder of this self-willed and vain-glorious patient had a share in bringing about the final catastrophe. "He had his

share—however far from his intention—in bringing his Healer to the cross." * Let us learn that obedience is the only true thankoffering for healed and pardoned sinners; and obedience in the line of the Lord's requirement. Not unusual, alas! is this man's mistake among the subjects even of Divine mercy. They will prate or boast or strain their service to some fond and far-off goal, when the plain, God-appointed work they should do for Jesus lies neglected in their hands. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

* Dr. George Macdonald.

V.

THE PARALYTIC LET THROUGH THE ROOF: PARDON SEALED BY POWER.

MATT. ix. 1-8; MARK ii. 1-12; LUKE v. 17-26.

A FEW days before this occurrence Jesus had healed almost all the sick people in Capernaum. The whole city on that occasion had been gathered together at the door of the house where He lodged to obtain or to witness the fruits of His power. During the intervening days He had retired into the wilderness for prayer. Now that He was returned, the excitement was as great as ever, the crowds as overwhelming; but His intention was to preach the Word, to follow up the miracles by testimony. The house where He was teaching was so filled that there was not room so much as about the doors. Some of the hearers were as unusual as the concourse was vast. "*There were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem.*" But the teaching met with an unusual interruption. The Lord's healing power was drawn upon for a special manifestation, which brought out in strong relief the real meaning of His miracles, viz., that they were signs and seals of Spiritual and Saving Grace.

It was the case of "one sick of the palsy," who

had either been overlooked at the former healings, or whom it had not been possible then to bring near to Jesus, or who had been struck down by his disease in the interval, and who was now brought, doubtless, by his own desire, and through the zeal of his friends, to share the benefit, as it were, out of season; to obtain the blessing of the violent who take it by force. They could not this day get at the Healer in the usual manner. The sufferer could not come otherwise than borne on his pallet. His bearers mounted to the roof, broke up the tiling, and let him down by ropes either into the upper room or into the central court where Jesus was teaching.* The surprise of the crowded audience at the interruption, their strained attention to see and hear what would follow, we can imagine. But, perhaps, we seldom realize the astonishment which filled their minds at the words which the Saviour first spoke. "*When He saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.*" Words surprising, but no doubt at first disappointing to the four friends, to the congregation, and to the disciples of Jesus. Also surprising, but not unwelcome, to those envious watchers, the Pharisees and scribes. What, no miracle after all! nothing but words, vain and fruitless; nay, bold and blasphemous! Surely they have caught Him now speaking unadvisedly with His lips. There was one to whom the words were neither vain nor disappointing—the man himself.

* The construction of an Eastern house made it easy enough to mount the roof from outside. The opening of the roof does not imply such danger or disturbance as we are apt to think of. Simplest of all, is the notion that the man was let down into the central court rather than into an upper room. And the description of the crowd favours this idea. Not one apartment, but the whole house, was thronged.

Doubtless the word,—spoken in reward of faith,—went directly to his heart, full as it was of a sense of sin, a desire for pardon, a fear of death, or a dread that he would miss salvation. "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."

Meanwhile the thoughts of the audience were busy, especially of those critics, those "sitters by," or "lookers on." "*Sitting there and reasoning in their hearts*," "*they said within themselves, This man blasphemeth;*" "*who can forgive sins but God only?*" The word "reasoning," as applied to their cogitations, is not out of place. These critics were not so unreasonable as some modern ones, who profess to receive Christianity and yet exclude the supernatural from the work and from the Person of Jesus Christ. If He was merely and simply man the Pharisees were right. But was He merely and simply man? There lay the whole question. Was He grasping at a Divine prerogative? Had He not given proof enough in the things done already that He held a Divine commission, and was able to speak for God to men's consciences and with Divine authority? Were they not present that day to discover at least whether it was so? And yet they were in their hearts prejudging and foreclosing the whole question. So Jesus answers them, takes up their unspoken thoughts, giving them, in so doing, another weighty proof of His Divinity. The Evangelists thus pointedly express it: "*When Jesus perceived in His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, He said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?*" A little before, it is simply recorded that He *saw* the faith of the paralytic and his four friends, for they gave visible proofs of it; but He employed His Spirit, His heart-searching power, to read the thoughts of the

scribes and Pharisees. "*Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?* Their displeasure was due, after all, not to zeal for God, not to jealousy for the Divine honour, but to this—that they were resolved not to acknowledge Jesus as sent of God. They heard His words, they saw His wonders, but when He went on to claim the power which belonged to Him, of forgiving sins—the power with which He came to bless mankind, that redeeming might of which both His teaching and His miracles were simply attestations—they say in their hearts, "This man blasphemeth." But this is the "Living Word" before whom men's hearts, too, are naked and opened, and He plunges into these hearts its dividing and disclosing knife.

For He goes on: "*Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?*" Our Lord does not mean to imply that it is easier to forgive sins than to heal disease. The contrary is implied. Does He, then, propose to prove His power to do a hard thing by doing a thing less hard? No! What He proposes to prove is His own claim to be credited with both powers—to be trusted in every word He utters. Now, says He, Whether is it easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, take up thy bed and walk? They could have no difficulty in answering, nor can we. It is much easier to "say" 'thy sins be forgiven thee.' Every Jewish rabbi—every so-called priest—can and does say it. But it is only when the true Saviour and Pardoner of men comes that He can say with equal ease and effect, 'Rise! take up thy bed and walk'—a power to which none of these false pardoners dare lay claim, though it be the lesser power of the two. For the claim 'to forgive sins' is one which cannot

be at once and easily disproved, even when it is false; but the claim to heal disease with a word—completely and immediately—is one which any child in the house will reject, if it be not at once verified. 'If then,' says Jesus, 'I give unquestionable evidence of Divine power, where you can all see it, by making this paralytic rise up and walk, you are bound to believe Me in the higher and spiritual region where you cannot see.'* "*But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins* (*He saith to the sick of the palsy*), *I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.*"

Notice what it was that lent a fresh and peculiar lustre to this act of healing—what made it seem unparalleled even to those who had seen Him work many and equally great miracles. It was this: He put on the foreground on this occasion and publicly proclaimed those spiritual and saving effects which on other occasions were quietly and privately wrought in the souls of those whose bodies He healed. Here He put the forgiveness of sins first—made the miracle of grace the thing predominant in the minds of all, and then wrought the physical cure as the seal or proof of the reality of pardon. So we read, "*They were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to-day*" (Luke). What was strange was not the miracle of healing, for such had He wrought among them in plenty; but the instantaneous and certain forgiveness of sins, supported by

* Cf. Steinmeyer's remarks on εὐκοπώτερον, as here used, *The Miracles of our Lord, etc.*, p. 84.

such unquestionable evidence. For no doubt could remain in any mind that, sure as this man's body rose strong and lithe before their eyes, loosed from the fetters of disease, his soul was risen up to life and liberty; he was a pardoned sinner, an accepted child of God. The wonderful work of that day was the salvation of a soul made visible, if we may so speak, sustained to the very senses, by the sign of bodily healing which immediately followed it.

The gist of the story is, that wherever Christ works unto salvation, the inner and more spiritual effects are countersigned and witnessed by other gifts of His of an outward and evident sort; or, to put it in a word, PARDON *is sealed by* POWER. The relative value put upon these two classes of effects of redeeming grace varies. The subject of them may prefer the pardon to the power. The onlookers may prefer the power to the pardon. But in the plan and work of their Author they are inseparably united, and their bearings and relations to each other are full of suggestiveness when duly considered. Let us look at their mutual relation :—

1. *In the personal sphere.* Power to resist sin is the only certain proof that sin is pardoned. Holiness is the best and indispensable evidence to ourselves that our sins are forgiven. Whether is easier to say: 'My sins are forgiven me,' or 'Soul, arise! take up the bed of thy spiritual inability and walk. Be victorious over temptation; be holy; be sin free'? Some of us can say whether we have found this task to be easy. How vainly you say it to yourself by yourself. How you might as soon say, 'Walk on the waters!' 'Fly in the air!' Is it not therefore as vain and foolish for us to pass acts of self-pardon and say, because of certain

feelings and impressions within our own heart, "My sins are forgiven me"? But you reply, "It was not 'my heart to my heart that said it'; no other than the voice of Jesus it was that sounded in those dear words, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.'" Was it so? Then let us bring it to the proof. When He says this He always follows it up by something more. He gives no counterfeit pardons. His forgiveness is always countersigned and sealed by power. He never leaves a forgiven soul paralyzed and powerless under the thrall, in the bonds of its iniquity. He never says, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," but He adds and means it, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk." "Sin," says Bishop Jeremy Taylor, "passes on to eternal death only by the line of impenitence. Sin can never carry us to hell, if the line be broken by a timely and effectual repentance. As then a man leaves his sin, he is pardoned and he is sure of it. . . . It is the blood of Christ that redeems us; but then only is it shown to be effectually applied to us when it redeems from our (former) vain conversation. . . . But they have great reason to doubt their pardon altogether whose repentance is broken into fragments, and is never a whole and entire change of life; those, I mean, who resolve against sin, and pray against it, and hate it in all the resolution of their understanding, till that unhappy period comes, or that special temptation is present in which they are used to act it; and, then, they shall as infallibly sin, as they will certainly repent it when they have done so." This is not to get the victory over sin, but to be within its power. For it is certain that they who sin and repent, and sin again in like circumstances, are under the power and dominion of sin. And they can do nothing so likely to drug their souls to an eternal sleep as to

keep on saying to themselves, "Pardon and peace," when the voice of Jesus has not said, Pardon and power.

It will not for a moment be supposed this means that holiness secures pardon, any more than the story could mean that the man received forgiveness because he arose and walked. Nor does it mean that holiness must be complete before one can be assured of pardon. This paralytic knew he was pardoned before he was healed, for Christ had said it. But the power that enabled him to arise and walk remained with him as the abiding evidence that His pardon was real. So in our salvation. We may be assured, and well assured, that we have heard the voice of Jesus say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." That assurance depends on His work, and is witnessed by His Spirit. But what we say is, let us mark how witnessed. If it was truly His voice that pardoned and commanded, you will arise and walk. You will be laying aside sin, and fleeing from sin, and rising above sin. Not satisfied with an easy and off-hand impression that all is well, you will "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure." *

2. *On the public scale.* Power to overcome sin, to assuage and finally remove the effects of sin, is the best witness to the Saviour's right to forgive it. Why did Jesus work this miracle of healing on the paralytic? He tells us Himself. Not only or chiefly for the man's sake, but "that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins."

In other words,—to put this on the broad and public scale,—the physical and social results of Christianity,

* Phil. ii. 12, 13 (R.V.).

though in their own degree inferior or second to its spiritual power, are the patent proofs of its reality, because they flow from that power. Jesus Christ has come into the world of morally sick and paralyzed men. He has proclaimed the gospel of pardon and peace with God. He has sealed His claim to the rightful and effectual proclamation of it by saying, also, with effect, to our sin-sick humanity, "Arise and walk." Christianity has changed the face even of the civilized world. It has elevated woman, freed the slave, repressed public cruelty, promoted constitutional government, spread the blessings of light and liberty wherever it has come; has built our hospitals, refuges, and asylums, institutions unknown to the world without Christ and before Christ. This is a great power, but it is the issue and proof of something greater. If that greater thing were not real and valid, these truly great results had never been effected by it. The visible and manifest benefits witness to a source deeper than themselves. The gospel of Jesus has promoted the healing of men's bodies, the opening of their minds, the elevation of their morals, because first and deepest it speaks always to the conscience and the heart, and has for its main business to put men right with God.

In our time there are strenuous attempts made to keep this link of connection out of sight. There are many who write and speak on behalf of the benefits and blessings of Christianity who would have us make nothing of its Divine claim. They dream, too, of conserving its social influence and even its exquisite ethical results, while by their teaching they empty it of its spiritual and supernatural character. Is this a thinkable or possible position? Let us suppose for a moment that the man in our story at that first word

of Jesus about forgiveness had looked up in His face with the reply that this was not at all the matter about which he had come; that a man and his sins must be left to God alone; that he had been brought, on the report of Jesus' healing power, to ask only the plain matter-of-fact boon of relief from his palsy,—is it likely there would have been any act of healing done that day? It is the question which must be faced by those who would separate the secondary benefits of the gospel from its primary claims, and imagine they can retain the former when they reject the latter. Those who think they approve Christianity because of the mental, moral, and even material progress which it promotes, while they disapprove its so-called mystical claim to deal with conscience of sin and peace toward God, have cut the ground from under their own feet. From the thing they reject, the gospel derives all its power to produce the thing they approve. It was a Christ accepted as the power of God to forgive sin who cured palsies and leprosies of old. It is the same Christ of God revealing Himself in spiritual power to men's inner experience who is the heart of Christianity still, and gives it all its effect upon the world at large.

Let us close with two questions: (1) Are we treating with the "Son of man" for the cure of sin, and accepting His treatment? The cure of sin, He tells us, begins with its forgiveness, with the settlement of the conscience in the sight of God. Let us not reverse the order of free grace. It requires not, first, complete conquest over sin, and, only then, provides pardon for it. On the contrary, sin forgiven is sin subdued—though the conquest must be followed up. It is "cancelled sin" of which the redeemed can confidently ask their Redeemer to "break the power." Is it to

Him we come for pardon? viz., to God's appointed Sin-bearer—the Lamb of God who taketh away sin, and therefore in His own Person has power to forgive. Let us beware of the self-deceiving as well as pretended piety of the scribes. "Who can forgive sins but God only?" they said; yet missed Divine forgiveness after all, for they knew not when He came, the Christ of God, the only One whom He has sent for the remission of sins.

(2) Do we believe that He "has power on earth to forgive sins"? It is true that forgiveness is a Divine and heavenly prerogative. Only He can discharge the debt to whom it is due. But it is an expressive setting forth of the grand fact of human redemption through the God-man, when as Son of man He claims to exercise on earth this Divine grace of pardon. Many who are habitual hearers of the gospel seem to miss this truth or pervert it. They speak as if the power of pardon had never yet come down from heaven, as if it were locked up in the secrets of eternity. The clearing of a soul from guilt is, they seem to think, something that stands only in the Divine purpose, never to be certainly known here by man, nor to yield any certain joy; possibly to be whispered on a death-bed, but never proclaimed till the judgment day. Jesus Christ preached a better gospel. His glorious claim as our Redeemer and Pardoner is to pronounce an immediate, an assured and abiding pardon,—down here, on earth, this very hour; in His word and by His spirit, He sheds abroad the sense of reconciliation in the sinner's heart, and to countless souls still says as He did of old: "Son! be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."

VI.

THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND.

MATT. xii. 9-14; MARK iii. 1-6; LUKE vi. 6-11.

IN all these three accounts this Healing is recorded in immediate connection with the incident of the disciples being challenged for plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath-day. It is evidently so placed by the Evangelists on purpose to bring out what Jesus taught as to the observance of the Sabbath, as to the place which works of necessity and mercy properly had on that day, even according to the law of Moses, much more the beneficent character of the day of which the Son of man claims to be Lord.

The time and place of this miracle are both very clearly indicated. It was on the Sabbath; "Another Sabbath," Luke says, than that on which the corn-plucking took place; and in their synagogue, where He was teaching according to His wont. "*There was a man there whose hand was withered.*" St. Luke, true to his habit of giving more exact details of the ailment, notes that it was the "right hand." The disease is supposed to have been a local atrophy, that is to say, a wasting confined to the part. The arm, small and useless, loses flesh, loses power, and finally becomes like a dead thing. Tradition says the man was a bricklayer, who

came to our Lord and besought Him for a cure that he might be able to work for his bread and not have to beg. Disabled as he was, he was found at the place of public worship on the Sabbath, and got a blessing there. Some have suggested that he was there upon the advice of the Pharisees, in order to lay a snare for Jesus ; but it is extremely unlikely that one who showed such direct and obedient faith in the Saviour, would have lent himself as a tool to His enemies. It is plain, however, that they took prompt note of his presence, and "*watched*" the Lord. Ever since the day when He said to the sick of the palsy, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," they had sought occasion against Him. And now this new accusation had come up, that in His healings He did not observe the rabbinic rules of Sabbath-keeping. It was part of their tradition that nothing of a medical kind should be done on the Sabbath, except in a very extreme case. And they watched Him now, for this one could have stood over till the next day.

They evidently expect, however, that He will cure the man. It has become so Divine a custom of His to heal, that though there was only one man in the synagogue with disease, and that such as might have been easily overlooked, they expect that it will not escape His gracious notice. Thus, out of His abundant goodness, they mean in their baseness to construct a snare. But Jesus knew their thought. He was aware of the point of interest on which it was fixed, and He went straight to that point. So far from avoiding the case, He Himself introduced it. He said to the man, "*Rise up and stand forth in the midst.*" The man silently did as he was bidden. Jesus put him where all might see. He prepared to do the miracle with more than usual formality and publicity, just because it

had been made by His enemies a test or trial of His views upon the subject under dispute. Note the fearless and dignified manner of the Lord Jesus, His signal wisdom and even kindness towards the objectors, while at the same time He hastened with bowels of compassion to help the sufferer.

Now that all eyes are looking on and every listener intent, the question is stated. Matthew says they put it, in the words, "*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days?*" Mark says that He put it to them, and Luke combines the two accounts. In their own thoughts, or in whispers among themselves, or perhaps even at last in some bold, outspoken word, they challenged Him, and He took up the challenge. During this anxious pause, when the attention of the whole synagogue is riveted upon Him, He puts the question. But He puts it wisely and rightly. "*I will ask you one thing. Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?*" 'Here is a diseased person who has come or who has been brought this day into My presence. My attention, as also yours, has been fixed upon his case. You say this is a question of work to be done, or not done, on the Sabbath. But I will convince you in your own consciences, that it is not a thing which may be lawfully let alone. Is this poor man to be dismissed, unhealed, when a word can heal him. Am I to do this evil, or am I to do good?' So putting the question, it is already answered. For it is not what amount of doctors' work may be done lawfully on the day of rest. Let the doctors settle that to their own Master. Are we to do evil on the Sabbath by letting good lie undone? Is that the Sabbath law? or, is it not rather in its spirit this which says: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." St. Matthew

at this point supplies us with an illustration which our Lord used to clench His argument.* 'Try your objection by what you yourselves would do were your own property concerned. You would not act as you want me to act, were it one of your own sheep which had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath day.' When temporal loss was in the case, they would speedily see through all sophistries about Sabbath work, and accommodate the traditions of the elders to their worldly interest. How humiliating to them, how characteristic of Him, the words that follow: "*How much, then, is a man better than a sheep!*" Jesus touchingly implies that to Him men are very precious. He is their Shepherd. They may hold one another cheap and valueless; but they have an immortal worth in His eyes. '*A man better than a sheep!* Of course he is. This is really too elementary teaching. It might be needful for blind Pharisees of old to be told so, but we know better than to need that.' Yes! we know better; but to do better is the thing. In this Christian Britain of ours is there no need still for this radical humanitarianism of Jesus Christ? Have the owners of the soil acted up to it as regards the dwellers on that soil? Have they always counted a man better than a sheep? or a deer? or shall we go lower in the scale of animal life for a man's worth in their eyes? Have the cultivators of the soil acted up to it in regard to those who "labour the land?" Have these labourers been always as well housed and cared for as the animals that share their labour, or the still lower animals that aid their master's sport? "A man better than a sheep!" It is to be feared we have not yet quite learned this elementary lesson in the love of our kind,

* Matt. xii. 11, 12.

and stand rebuked before the simple and sublime philanthropy of Him who gave His life for men, and counts one human being of more value than the whole material world. "*Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days.*"

To put a question properly is almost to answer it, and this putting of the question by Jesus about Sabbath-healing really answered it altogether. "Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good or to do evil?" And then that illustration of the sheep in the pit left no evasion possible. The objectors were completely nonplussed. "*They held their peace.*" They were silenced. They were not however convinced, so as by hearty confession to withdraw their hard thoughts of Him; but in sullen silence cherished these thoughts still. "*He looked round about upon them all,*" He threw a rapid, searching glance round the whole company to see if there was any softening, any faith. "*With anger,*"—the meek and gracious Redeemer angry! Yes! surely! a holy resentment—a righteous indignation, at wilful blindness, at persistent unbelief. Angry at sin, and therefore angry without sin. But, mark what is joined with it,—"*being grieved for the hardness of their hearts,*"—vexed at their wilful blindness to plain truth, their hard-hearted resistance to simple human love. Look on that pitying face from which the flush of holy wrath melts, only to change into the sadness of compassion. What a glimpse it gives us into the story of His life on earth! His holy soul has to dwell in the closest contact with sin, has to read its darkest lines in the depths of men's hearts, has to enter, as here, into direct conflict with it, to endure its opposition to His kingdom, its assaults upon His own Person and Work,—

the contradiction of sinners against Himself. Truly in all this He was "bearing the sins of many."

Let us finish here, what the story has to tell us of the defeat and rage of the Pharisees. He had answered them completely. And, then, He did more. He wrought the miracle in such a way as to afford them no handle. "*He saith to the man, Stretch forth thine hand, and he stretched it out, and his hand was restored whole as the other.*" Was there anything in this which, even on their own principles, could be called Sabbath-work? There was no examination of the disease, there was no preparation for the cure, there was no touching even of the withered limb, there was in fact no outward or overt act of healing at all. The thing was done silently by the Lord's own unexpressed will; He said to the man, "Stretch out thine hand," and when the man did so, it was to prove that the miracle had been wrought without observation. "*And they were filled with madness*"—with rage at their defeat, at the breaking of their traditional rules, the fall of their authority, the honour brought to Jesus by every fresh work. Baffled in mere fault-finding, they now band and plot together—ally themselves for this purpose with the Herodians, the court-party in Galilee, to whom on political grounds they were quite opposed. Already, at this early period, their councils point forward to His death. The immediate result was virtually to close His Capernaum ministry. For though we shall find not a few miracles yet done in Capernaum, He laboured no more so statedly in that town and synagogue, but occupied Himself thenceforth in missionary tours to different parts of the country.

It is pleasing now to turn to the person most immediately interested in this miracle, viz., the man

himself. He had quietly and modestly kept his place in the synagogue till the Lord bade him "Rise and stand forth in the midst." At that bidding He came forward, a silent but steady example of faith. And there are two things in his conduct which cast a special lustre upon it; the one more external, the other more internal and spiritual.

1. *He obeyed God rather than men.* He doubtless knew what was going on in the meeting. He was aware of the malice of the Pharisees. He knew that they were watching Jesus to accuse Him of healing on the Sabbath. By his prompt obedience he took the side of Jesus against the Pharisees, and submitted himself entirely to His direction. There is something very instructive in the readiness of such men,—the man at Bethesda, the blind man of John ix., and this man here,—to side with Jesus against His powerful opponents on the disputed question of the Sabbath-law. It was not mere self-interest; no doubt it was natural for them to take the side of their Healer and Helper. But the fact is capable of another explanation. Their readiness to go with Him in a matter of external obedience was the proof of that instinctive and deep-lying trust in Him, which made them fit subjects for His healing. These poor men went with Jesus on the Sabbath question because of their faith in Him for everything. It was the instinct of spiritual life which kept them right where the wise and learned were wrong. So has it been many times in the history of Divine Grace. It is often alleged that the humbler members of the Christian body—the "common folk" of our Evangelical Churches for instance, over-rate secondary points in religion, adhere to particular doctrines, practices, or movements without much reason or argument. They may have

something better than argument. When the heart of God's children responds to the guidance of His Spirit, it is quick to discern where Christ is. Adhesion to one side or another of some so-called minor question may for them make all the difference between following or departing from Him.

2. *This man obeyed where obedience was an act of pure trust.*—The first command, "Rise up and stand forth," tested the courage of his faith; it rose above the fear of man. The second command, "Stretch forth thine hand," tested the inner, deeper faith of the spiritual nature. Had he not been completely reliant on Christ, he would at this point have doubted. His hand was withered. He could not do this thing that he was bid to do. But he implicitly obeyed, and in obeying he was healed. In that moment of stretching it out, it was restored whole as the other. It is an impressive illustration of the way of life. There is none that casts a clearer light on the foolish puzzles men make to themselves out of the doctrines of grace. I have no spiritual ability. I cannot repent. I cannot believe. I cannot come to Christ. Yet the Divine voice sounding in my ear from Jesus' lips, is, "Repent! Believe! Come unto Me and live!" At this point it is with some not unusual to say, they know it is their duty to believe, but they cannot believe; they ought to come, but they cannot come. Now, in so far as this is true, what does it mean? It means that of and by ourselves we cannot. But God never bids us of our own strength to believe. When He commands what we cannot of ourselves do, He pledges and promises in that command grace and strength to do it. Think, again, for a moment of this man's cure, or that of the Paralytic let down through the roof. "Stretch out thine hand," "Rise

up and walk," "Take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." Did these men say, any one of them, "I cannot do this thing. It is my disease that I cannot move." It would have been quite true as regards the sufferers. But who was the Speaker? 'Twas no common passer-by that mocked them with an empty call to get up or stand forth? No; it was the Divine Healer and Helper of men. They heard and heeded Him, and were cured in the act.

So it is with us all in believing unto salvation. We are in ourselves helpless, graceless, strengthless. Jesus says, "Look unto Me and be ye saved," "Come unto Me and rest," "Believe and live." Is it for any one of us to say, "I cannot"? If it were only the preacher's advice, or a friend's prescription, it might be so answered. But this is Jehovah-Jesus who commands—

> "Thou tempest-tossëd soul, be still,
> My promised grace receive;
> 'Tis Jesus speaks. I *must*, I *will*,
> I *can*, I *do* believe."

VII.

THE CENTURION OF GREAT FAITH.

MATT. viii. 5-13; LUKE vii. 1-10.

THIS is another of the mighty works that were done in Capernaum. Jesus wrought a miracle in this town before ever He came to it (John iv. 46). On the first Sabbath of His public teaching in it, He wrought so many that the Evangelists could not record them in detail. And though, as has been said, the stated Capernaum ministry appears about this time to have been broken in upon, His miracles there did not cease. Both the recording Evangelists place this incident in immediate sequence to the Sermon on the Mount. It probably occurred on His return to Capernaum from the tour in the course of which that sermon was spoken.

"*There came unto Him a certain centurion.*" A centurion was an officer in the Roman army who commanded a company (nominally) of a hundred men. Four such are honourably mentioned in the New Testament. They were mostly Italians by birth. This one was probably in the service of Herod. Like Cornelius, he was a proselyte or convert to the faith of Israel before He became a believer in Jesus. It was precisely among such persons that the Gospel had its earliest triumph

and greatest success. Educated and upright Gentiles, sick of the immoralities and puerilities of the old heathen religions, finding in the higher circles around them only a general scepticism, sought for light in the pure revelation of the Hebrews, and were thus prepared to accept Christ and His Gospel with a readiness surpassing that of the Jews. This narrative anticipates many similar suggestions in the Acts of the Apostles, and hints not obscurely the course that Christianity was to take among the nations. Further, the story is that of a soldier's faith. His frank and ready acceptance of the claims of Jesus, his bold confession of belief in His supreme authority and power, his simplicity, decision, humility, all make this man stand out at the head of a long and honourable line of Christian soldiers. These hold an eminent rank in the annals of Divine grace from this man's time and that of Cornelius of Cæsarea down to those of Colonel Gardiner, of Hedley Vicars, and of Henry Havelock.

The character of the man comes out (*a*) in his natural affection and care for his servant, a slave, yet specially valuable and dear to him as a son. The word used in both accounts to describe the lad (besides "slave") is one which answers to the old English "chylde," and denotes a servant in a peculiarly honourable sense.* (*b*) In his reverence for such religious light as he had already attained, and by his readiness to promote it in the most liberal way. "He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue," was the testi-

* Matthew uses παῖς only. Luke uses it in the reported speech of ver. 7, "Speak the word, and my *boy* shall be healed." Otherwise the third Evangelist uses δοῦλος throughout. Παῖς is translated in Acts iv. 27 by "child," where the Old Testament conception of Messiah as both son and servant is the one which rules the expression.

mony of the Jewish authorities to his worth. (*c*) By his modesty and reticence, reckoning himself as a Gentile and a soldier unworthy either to go personally to Jesus or have Jesus come to him, using, therefore, the intercession of the Jews—thus acknowledging the place of the chosen people. His was one of those lovely and loveable characters who by some gift of nature, some Divine predisposition, are not far from the kingdom of heaven. When its door was opened to him he went immediately in. There is some variation in the two narratives as to detail. Matthew's represents the centurion as going to Jesus and preferring his request in person, and consistently relates the whole conversation as taking place between the Lord and him. Luke's more circumstantial account tells that from the first he employed his Jewish friends to convey the request. They did so with an urgency which misinterpreted probably the original message, "Beseeching the Lord that He would come and heal" the patient. When Jesus was on the way to the house, another message met Him, explaining why he did not himself come to Jesus,—deprecating the trouble and the social risk implied in such a visit. Then Jesus, with an outburst of wonder at the centurion's faith, implied almost without words that the thing he requested was done, and when the messengers returned they "*found the servant whole which had been sick.*" That one of these accounts has undergone modification is obvious. The most natural mode of explaining the modification is to hold that the more abbreviated narrative relates what passed through interposing persons and messages, as if it had been directly transacted between Jesus and the centurion himself. Such variation perfectly consists with historical validity, on the common sense principle,

that one may be said to do that which he causes others to do for him. Such independent rendering of the same transaction *in minutiis* by the two narrators is better evidence of its historicity than an exact verbal agreement in the two accounts could have been.

The case itself is thus described in the two narratives. It was one of paralysis accompanied by grievous pain (Matt.); and the sufferer was considered "ready to die" (Luke). Non-professional commentators have been a good deal troubled about this description of "palsy,"—the more ordinary features of that disease being painless infirmity and long, but not dangerous illness. Medical authority finds no difficulty in the description. Another proof that the more knowledge of all sorts we bring to the study of the sacred narratives the better. "In this instance," says Sir Risdon Bennet, "we have probably a case of progressive paralysis, attended by muscular spasms, and involving the respiratory movements, where death is manifestly imminent and inevitable. In such a case there would be symptoms indicative of great distress, as well as immediate danger to life." * Our Lord's healing of this grievous disease is described in a single phrase (Matt. viii. 13; Luke vii. 10). It was one of those instantaneous cures wrought by a word and at a distance from the patient, which were the exception among His healings rather than the rule. The exception in each case was determined by the circumstances and the faith of the petitioner. Compare this one with those of the courtier's son and the Syrophenician's daughter. The reasons why

* *The Diseases of the Bible*, p. 92. See also several similar cases described from actual observation, Belcher, *Our Lord's Miracles of Healing*, p. 56. Trench calls attention to the account of the death of Alcimus in 1 Macc. ix. 55, 56, as one from "palsy" with great torment.

most of His cures were done in presence of the patients and their friends are obvious enough. But the inference from these healings at a distance is valuable. They help to set aside the unsatisfactory explanation of Jesus' healing power which some seek to derive from His personal magnetism, His power of personal influence, or the analogy of alleged removals of nervous disease through beneficent human agency of this kind. "The power that could arrest disease of a mortal character and recal to life by a word spoken at a distance, . . . was a spiritual force of a different order from that possessed by any mesmerist, magician, or mortal man."*

The points in this occurrence which made the main impression on those who witnessed it at the time, and on those by whom it was afterwards narrated, come out when we observe where the two accounts exactly and verbally coincide. These are the expression of confidence which the centurion placed in Jesus, drawn in a memorable way from the familiar facts of his own professional life. Then, the Lord's expression of wonder at such faith, and the incisive terms in which He set forth its greatness. The Lord "marvelled,"—a genuine human wonder,—which we shall not find at all stumbling, or foreign to our conception of the man Christ Jesus, unless we have allowed one-sided theological views to take our Saviour away from us and cannot tell where they have laid Him. We read sometimes that He "marvelled" at men's unbelief (Mark vi. 6). This day He "marvelled" at faith. It delighted the heart of the Son of man with a rare joy. He pointed it out to the crowd. He dwelt upon it. He compared it with such faith—genuine enough—as He had

* Sir R. Bennet, *ut supra*, p. 96.

already met with; and He gave it the palm. He "had not found such faith, no not in Israel." Then, without a word more about the disease of the boy, without a step nearer the house, the cure was done. It was not to work the cure Jesus had gone so far. It was simply the natural human impulse yielding to the hearty solicitations of the friends. But when His having done so brought out the centurion's great and self-effacing faith, the Lord was more than satisfied. Up to the soldier's expectation and beyond it, the gracious answer was given.

As in all such cases, our Lord takes pains to fix our attention on the faith in response to which the cure was wrought. Let us ask wherein consisted the *greatness* of the faith here so signally praised.

1. It was great *when we consider the man in whom it was found.* "When he heard of Jesus." The centurion had not apparently been present at any of the numerous healings done in that city, yet on the report of these he resolves to put the desperate case of his servant into His hands. How favourably does he contrast with those who saw many miracles yet did not believe. Moreover, he could make no claim in his own right to the ministry and mercy of Jesus. In the way of his faith there was a barrier not present to others. According to St. Matthew, the Lord uses this for warning. He reminds His hearers that their national privileges would not secure salvation. Here was a stranger entering the kingdom before them—a first fruits of those who should rise up speedily and lay claim to the blessings of Christ's Gospel. Yes! glancing forward to the day when all God's children should be gathered round their Father's table, the prophetic eye of the world's Redeemer sees the blessed myriads of the nations seated with the

fathers of the Covenant, while many of its children have no place there. This faith, then, was in itself so great that the Lord had not found the like, so prompt, so implicit, so profound, so honouring to God's grace; not among the townsfolk of Capernaum, nor the Jews of Jerusalem, nor the disciples themselves. No! not in Israel. How much greater when we consider who and what he was. This Roman soldier was the morning star of Western faith,—first among "the many" who should "come from the West," and sit down in the kingdom of God; and they have come. Should not the "tide of empire westward rolled," lead us to look out in hope for the fulfilling of that other word; that the East shall send her dusky myriads to glory, as the West already her hardy and restless sons? But let us not forget the warning word. *We* are the children of the kingdom now. The simple and despised are going in, while the educated and the cultivated are being left out.

2. This faith was great *in its view of Christ's Power*. The words it used have left a deep mark on the Gospel narrative. Jesus had awakened the thirst and fire of consecrated faith in his fisher-apostles by a symbolic work within the sphere of their calling. But this man's faith expressed itself with rough poetic force in the language appropriate to his own: "*For I also am a man set under authority*" (Luke vii. 8). His argument is evidently one from less to more. 'I am a servant, and know how to obey; a master, and know how to be obeyed. If my word, who am only a subordinate in command, be so promptly heeded, how much more Thine? My word, with the authority of Herod or Cæsar, how much more Thine with the authority of God!' "*Only speak the word, and my servant shall be healed.*" Simply and boldly the imperial idea is applied by this

honest believer to the region of the Kingdom. The stringent order of military obedience is an image to his mind of the absolute certainty with which its Head must be obeyed. The union of all governmental power, as then known on earth, in the will of king or emperor, represents the subjection of all things to this Gracious One in whom is mirrored the love and grace of Highest God. And in its bold simplicity this faith hits the mark. Though it be not all the truth—as what one conception or figure can contain all the complex fulness of the kingdom of God?—it goes to the heart of the truth about the power of Christ. It puts the crown of the universe on His head, and the sceptre of universal dominion into His hand. It views all the bright armies of heaven, all the myriad inhabitants of earth, all the powers of nature, and all the resources of grace as at the bidding of Jesus.

In so thinking and speaking, faith acts just as it ought. Such whole-hearted honour put upon the Lord is the least tribute faith in Him ought to bring. Is there anything so miserable and foolish as our half-hearted, grudging, and timid faith, that trusts Him a little and then misgives and draws back? Total unbelief, blind and guilty though it be, has a kind of consistency about it. It allows Him nothing; it denies Him all. But to allow Him some power and not all, to trust Him half way, is so unreasonable. To suppose He can help in an easy case, but not in a hard one; near at hand, but not at a distance —to look for stinted answers, and niggard blessings, few fruits and rare conversions—is not all this the thing which starves our spiritual life and dishonours Christ and impoverishes His kingdom. Oh! to believe and pray and work in the faith of this centurion that all

power is given unto Jesus both in heaven and on earth, that His Power is ready at the touch of need, at the cry of faith, to fly apace upon its errands of mercy.

3. This faith was great *in its sole dependence upon Christ and His will.* Almost all who came to Jesus for cures thought it needful to bring the sufferer into His presence, or if the patient was too ill for that, to have Him come and stand over the bed and touch, and speak, and heal. Their faith, even where real enough, needed the personal contact, the external means. This man's faith rose at one bound above all these restrictions. It needed no help from sight or sense. It made nothing of difficulty or distance. It viewed all things as Christ's servants; the imperial eagles of His grace needed no other highway through the universe than the Lord's commandment and His suppliant's faith. In this it was unparalleled in the experience of Jesus, and He spake and acted accordingly, not only crowning this remarkable faith with its appropriate encomium, but answering to it by simply bidding the disease depart. By a silent act of His will, without those means and signs with which most of His cures were wrought, was this one done. How slow we often are to trust the Lord till we can see how and by which means He will answer or deliver us. If we trusted Him heartily and thoroughly, we should be far more willing to leave all in His mighty and gracious hands. We should never prescribe to Him how we would have deliverance come. He is King of all hearts, commander of all armies; and whether He choose to save by many or by few, nigh at hand or afar off, let Him only say the word and the blessing shall come.

4. This faith was great *in its self-forgetting humbleness.* There was not a vestige of desire for honour to

himself, for consideration of his standing, in the way the centurion preferred his request. Indeed, there was the fullest expression of the opposite. "*Lord! trouble not Thyself, for I am not worthy*, etc." Most striking humility! Men called the centurion noble and honourable. He was worthy, they said, for whom Jesus should do this. He showed that gracious unconsciousness of it all which belongs to the truest worth. He thought Himself unfit even to make personal application to Jesus. Jesus thought it not unmeet to propose going to him. He was unworthy in his own esteem to receive Jesus under his roof; and therefore was counted worthy Christ should dwell in his heart.* So mindful of Jesus, so unmindful of self, is this man, that he would have the Lord get all the honour, and the thing be so done as to keep himself out of sight altogether. How hard it is to be simple, unconscious, and humble in our faith—to have no thought of our own credit and honour in the work of grace on ourselves and others! But this is faith's true mark—None but Christ.

Such, then, is a Great Faith. Its greatness is proved when itself is forgotten and Christ is all in all. Glass is good just in proportion as you see no glass, are conscious of no medium, but only of the landscape it discloses or the sunlight it transmits. This is great faith, which looks so wholly at Christ's Power as to see no difficulty in the hardest case; so wholly at Christ's will as not even to think of the means by which the blessing may be wrought, if only He wills it; so wholly at Christ's glory, that no thought of self steals in at all. We can conceive how the Lord marvelled and said, "I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel."

* Augustine, quoted by Trench.

VIII.

AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA.

JOHN v. 1-18.

THIS is the first of St. John's three Judean miracles selected not only for doctrinal purposes, but as typical examples of the Saviour's mighty works. In this "the lame walks," in the next (chap. ix.) "the blind receives sight," in the crowning instance (chap. xi.) "the dead is raised up." The present narrative divides itself into three scenes, where the subject of it is found and dealt with: *At the Pool; On the Street;* and *In the Temple.*

1. *At the Pool* (vv. 2-9). So rich is Jerusalem even to this day in the remains of ancient reservoirs and fountains, that modern geographers cannot agree which of several suitable localities was Bethesda. That called the Fountain of the Virgin or the Upper Pool of Siloam is now the favourite. It lies to the south of the Temple area. Along one side of it are the remains of ancient columns, which once probably supported the porches or halls named in the story. Our Lord's Sabbath morning walk led Him, purposely no doubt, past this place. What the scene was like we may fairly conjecture. It is easy to picture to ourselves an open-air tank or bath surrounded by covered enclosures, in which lay the sick

folk waiting for the medicinal period of the Fountain's waters.* The beneficent eye of the Healer rests upon the one in that hospital whose case was the worst; the senior of the house; a man who had suffered from paralysis or entire nervous prostration for eight-and-thirty years. How much of that time he had lain in the porches is not said. There had been very little chance of cure from the first, as he afterwards explains; there was now very little hope. He continued there more from habit than anything else. His face wore the look of dull acquiescence that comes by hope deferred. On him Jesus fixed His gaze—"*saw him, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case.*" It is a sentence to remember by the bedsides of those on whom long, wearing, wearisome infirmity has descended. He knows our frame, tells our wanderings, puts our tears into His bottle. Nigh forty years had this man been a helpless wreck, yet the moment of his deliverance had at last come. "*Wilt thou be made whole?*"† A startling question, intended to take the man's attention, rouse his expectations, revive his dead or dying hopes, and so prepare him for the exercise of faith. The

* All critical opinion is now agreed that ver. 4 of the *Textus receptus* is a marginal gloss which has crept into the text. It seems better, however, to retain, in spite of some variations of reading, the last clause of ver. 3: "*Waiting for the moving of the waters.*" The evidence for this is strong enough to convince such judges as Ewald and Godet, though not the Revisers of the English Version. The R.V., by relegating this clause, along with ver. 4, to the margin, takes away something helpful to the understanding of ver. 7: ὅταν ταραχθῇ τὸ ὕδωρ, "when the water is troubled." That the waters were beneficial and were moved at intervals are facts recognised in the narrative. It is only the description of the supposed cause—an angel visit—which disappears from the true text.

† "*Wouldest thou*" (R.V.). Θέλεις lays stress on the *will*, which shared in the paralysis.

words so thoroughly succeeded in startling him, that he feels as if he had been charged with carelessness or indifference in not being healed. He explains what the marginal note of ver. 4 was, no doubt, meant to prepare us for and to expand—that his poor and unbefriended condition made it impossible for him to get the cure, for which yet he seems to wait. This he states as if he felt instinctively that the Questioner was one to whom his whole mind should be opened. Jesus accepts the frankness and trustfulness of the answer; takes him at his word. He is willing, but he is not able to be made whole. He cannot avail himself of the healing waters. Well! he shall have help from another and unexpected source. "*Rise! take up thy bed, and walk.*" With this word of authority there went, no doubt, to complete the impression, the tones of the Speaker and the look—that undescribed and probably indescribable thing, which must have oft shone through the fleshly veil to those who were privileged to behold the Word made flesh. The man felt that this Unknown One was no ordinary being. What would have been mockery from common lips he received as truth and life from those which now opened to bid him rise and walk. He asked no question. He started no difficulties. He obeyed as his Deliverer bade him, and he was healed in the act of obeying. He took up the little pallet—by this time in all likelihood a wretched mass of rags—on which he had lain so long.* In his joy he would most likely have left it there, had not his Healer expressly bidden him bear it. For what purposes is clear. Hardly to be a reminder of his by-past errors, far less a badge of shame; but rather (*a*) as a proof of his power not only to walk, but to bear his bed, and so

* κράββατον is the distinctive word for the meanest kind of couch.

of his complete recovery; (*b*) as a mark of identity that he was the very man who had lain so long helpless in Bethesda's porches; (*c*) as a test of his faith, of gratitude to his Deliverer—a proof-test which was to be of so much moment for the issue and impression of the whole occurrence. It was fitted to show that he did fully trust and implicitly obey his gracious Healer, for "*it was the Sabbath on that day.*"

Thus, 'at the Pool,' the sufferer and the Saviour met. In the Saviour's word and act we see uncaused and unsought grace, pure redeeming mercy. In its immediacy and ease we are reminded of the Creative Fiat. He commanded and it stood fast. In the helpless sufferer we note openness, trust, and implicit obedience. He rose at a word, when mere nature and sense felt every physical impossibility. He went at a word, when there was almost equal difficulty in the social and religious sphere.

2. *On the street* (vv. 10-13). We follow the man now from the scene of his cure to the scene of his trial; from where he met his Saviour to where he must meet his Saviour's enemies and witness for his Healer. The cured man is passing along the street carrying his bed. Such an action on the Sabbath was fitted, and doubtless intended, to draw attention. Had he gone away light and free, men would not have known of the cure. Had it been an ordinary day of work and burdens when he passed along carrying his bed, he would have escaped notice. But this day he arrested so much attention that the religious authorities—whom St. John not unusually denotes as "the Jews"—interfered. Ver. 10: "*They said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath-day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.*" A strange mental phenomenon.

These men cannot but have known one who had been so long a cripple. They were certainly made aware of the fact of his cure. Yet they can take no notice of it. They put no questions about the cure; how he who had lain so long helpless was lithe and active now. For this only they have eyes: he is carrying a burden on the Sabbath-day. They are so bent upon small righteousnesses that they contrive to overlook the Saviour of the world and His wonders of mercy. Ver. 11: "*He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk.*" Simple and straightforward faith! 'He who has wrought such a healing could surely enjoin no wrong.' True and genuine insight! the insight of faith which tracks and holds by the Divine, both in the physical and in the moral region, in places where sense has little or no light. 'He bade me, a cripple, rise and walk. I did it and was right, for He is mighty. He bade me thus carry my bed on the Sabbath. I do it, and again I cannot but be right, for He who is so mighty must be holy too.' Such was the instinctively wise and firm-footed reasoning of this believing soul. Compare the similar utterances of the blind man in chap. ix. But the reasoning in this case, as in that, had no effect. They only want to know (ver. 12) who it was that had caused this scandal. Note the malignity and bitterness of their question. It is not, 'Who is He that cured thee?' 'Let us know who is this wonderful and merciful Healer, that we may go with thee to adore Him;' but, 'Who is He that bade thee carry thy bed on the Sabbath?' A more appalling example of the blinding effects of self-righteousness could not well be imagined. They built up their whole fabric of religion upon minute observance, not so much of God's law, as of their own traditional glosses and

expositions of it.* They can see no good in One who held different views and followed a different practice. He must be a sinner. He has broken the Sabbath, and no miracle of healing which He may have wrought must weigh for a moment against this judgment. At the time the man was not able to identify his Healer. Jesus had slipped away through the crowd. His appearance was not familiar to the patient. This new disciple was thus tried and tested, not without secret upholding grace. When, from his after interview with Jesus, he learnt His place as well as His power, he went with characteristic frankness to the Jews with the information. So we read the character and its lesson. It is a picture of faith and bigotry opposed. Bigotry said, This cannot be a miracle. This man, being a sinner, cannot be a Saviour. What met this effectively was not lukewarmness, not a mere vague and tolerant 'perhaps.' It was a firm persuasion that the Healer was good and holy, as He was merciful and mighty. Earnest, well-grounded faith is the only successful antidote to blind and bitter zeal. Here we have the two, face to face, in that street of Jerusalem.

When the man had told the rulers that it was Jesus who had healed him, their opposition showed itself in some openly persecuting form, for their rage at this assault on their favourite orthodoxism was on this occasion stirred to its depths. He had not only broken their Sabbath law Himself, but had induced another to do the like. He might go on till He had led the people into rebellion against the whole system. He, on the other hand, "answered them." That is to say, in His public

* Of those about Sabbath observance see a minute account in Stapfer's *Palestine in the Time of Christ*, p. 350 (Hodder & Stoughton : 1886).

teaching at the time He made a reply which has left its mark deep on this narrative. He carried His argument into the very citadel of their legalistic Sabbath doctrine. On some other occasions of Sabbath-healing,* He had replied to their scruples by reference to the law of kindness, which supersedes that of ritual (Matt. xii. 12; Luke xiii. 15, and xiv. 5). To other Sabbatic scruples He had opposed the superiority of man, especially the Son of man, over that which was made for him, not he for it (Mark ii. 28). But here He assails the principle on which they grounded their minute rules about what work might or might not be done on the Sabbath-day. It was a perversion of the sacred record, "God rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made" (Gen. ii. 2). His reply is that the living God, His Father, does not keep the Sabbath in their sense of it. Ceaseless are His works of benevolence and power in the world which He once for all has made. So also the Son. He supersedes the law of rest from labour on the Sabbath-day by the higher law applicable to Him and to His Father of work which is always rest. Man's nature requires that weekly pause from week-day work. He expends himself in world's work. So God commands for him a day in which he may not only cease from earth, but look to heaven. With the Son of God it is otherwise. His Divine work needs no cessation. To heal men's bodies and save men's souls breaks no Sabbath. It is part of the unceasing work of Highest God. "*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*" The Son of God cannot possibly break the Sabbath in such deeds of mercy, any more than the loving Father of all with whom He stands in unbroken union and fellowship. This climax of our Lord's Sabbatic arguments

* See the Sabbath-cures briefly discussed *ante*, pp. 29-31.

brought out the anti-climax of His enemies' utmost hate. "*Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only brake the Sabbath, but also called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God*" (R.V.).

3. *In the Temple* (vv. 14, 15). The Healer and the healed meet once more,—this time in God's house; another link connecting these Sabbath-miracles with Divine service. The man had gone to the Temple so soon as he was free from his burden and from his questioners, full of thankful thoughts, after eight-and-thirty years of enforced absence. Another proof that he was, in his chastened spirit, a fit subject for the Lord's healing work. Jesus repaired to the sacred place, among other reasons, doubtless, for the purpose of finding him and completing His spiritual work in the man—to reveal Himself more fully to the man's soul, and thus perfect the inward cure. When the Lord found him He said (v. 14), "*Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee*" (R.V.). Here we have a benefit recalled and an injunction given. First an affectionate and solemn reminder of blessing received. How strange that to the newly-healed the Healer must say, "Thou art made whole." Yet this is our constant experience. We so soon forget the blessings Christ bestows, that continual reminders and gracious counsels are needful. Then a tender and faithful warning: "Sin no more." As in a former case Jesus had brought out the connection between pardon and power, so here He discovers the link between sin and suffering. He points out sin as the cause of all sickness, sorrow, death, and woe. It is true that He expressly refuses to help men to blame their neighbours by tracing particular sufferings or misfortunes to their own particular sins (cf. Luke xiii. 1-5; John ix. 2-4). But in dealing with

the individual conscience, as here, and in a former instance (Luke v. 20), He takes quite another method, and pushes home this inference to its depths. What an affecting sign of our nature's weakness, of our moral impotence, that we need such proofs and reminders and warnings: 'You have suffered; you are healed: sin no more.' Note, further, how this last affectionate injunction is planted firmly between a remembered blessing and a threatened woe: "Lest a worse thing come unto thee." A worse thing! worse than the major portion of a lifetime spent in helplessness and misery! Surely this would be something worse than death. Is it not a hint of the 'second death,' the doom of the impenitent? Man's present life is full of the pains and penalties of sin; but these plainly, in Christ's view, do not exhaust sin's awful and prolific harvest. The righteousness of the principle on which they happen at all in this world prepares for 'eternal sin' an eternal judgment. Besides the general truth of the connection between sin and suffering here vindicated, we have in all likelihood something more special. The case here dealt with by Jesus was one in which disease and sin are mixed up together; where what began as sin remains as disease, and that which is now disease continues to breed sin. We find the characteristics of the gracious Healer peculiarly illustrated in an instance which brings us within the shadow of these obscure and difficult forms of human ill. He shows at once the utmost tenderness for the sufferer and the sternest faithfulness towards the sinner. He lays down also the profound and ever-to-be-remembered law, that the cure in such cases is, at heart, moral and spiritual, not merely physical. He says, in effect, to this man: 'Though I have now lifted you up from your "mattress-

grave," you are not cured unless you cease from sin. My cure is one of soul and body together. My word avails for both, if you will but hear it. As effectual as was My "Rise and walk," shall now be, when heard in your inmost spirit, My "Sin no more."'

Is there not a width and depth in this word of Jesus which reaches into the recesses of the Christian ethic? This man had heard and obeyed Christ in two things already. As he acted on the Lord's first bidding his palsy was removed. As he acted on the second and bore his bed through the Sabbath quiet of the Jerusalem streets, his witness was crowned with an undying interest and meaning. As he should hear and act upon the third, he should be eternally blessed. The power of the Bidder was pledged in all three cases alike when He issued the instruction. At the command of Jesus, and in the power of His might-giving word, he did the first two. May we not conclude that he lived from this time forth a holy life in the power of that last and highest commandment?

To be no more a sinner—not to sin—is the law of the believer's heart and life, because it is his Saviour's command. The resolution of the saint's paradox with which the Christian doctrine of sanctification has so much to do must be found on this principle, "Lord, give what Thou commandest, and then command what Thou wilt." Does He not give it in the command itself? If, when He says, 'Rise, walk,' you successfully obey—if, when He says, 'Witness, work, face the hostile world as a saved sinner,' you obey and conquer because He has conquered—why, when He says, 'Sin no more,' should you not also succeed by His grace? "He that is born of God doth not commit sin, and he cannot sin, because His seed abideth in him."

IX.

THE GADARENE AND OTHER DEMONIACS.

MATT. viii. 28-34, xii. 22-37; MARK v. 1-20; LUKE viii. 2, 26-39, xi. 14-23.

THE mission to Gadara contains but one incident, though a very striking one. The Lord crossed the lake to do this one work, and then return. It was as He landed from the voyage, made memorable by the storm-stilling, that this encounter took place. Modern research claims to have ascertained the exact locality of the transaction. St. Luke says it was "over against Galilee." The ruins right opposite the plain of Gennesaret, from which they had sailed, bear still the name of Kersa or Gersa. "The country of the Gerasenes" is the general indication given in at least two of the Gospels, according to the reading adopted by the revisers. About a quarter-of-an-hour to the south of Gersa is a steep bluff, which descends abruptly on a narrow ledge of shore. The whole neighbourhood abounds in limestone caverns and rock-chambers. These local features meet the requirements of the story. Night had long since fallen, if we follow the consecution of the narrative preceding,—possibly morning had dawned ere they made the shore. No sooner almost had they stepped out upon it than

their journey was interrupted by the attack of a fierce demoniac. The first Gospel speaks of two, but the terrible pre-eminence of one of these has left its mark on the reminiscence of the eye-witnesses, and the other two accounts speak of him alone. The gloomy mountains close to the eastern shore of the lake, at this part, were his haunt. His special abode was "among the tombs"—those caves, namely, which served for vaults of sepulture, and dens of unclean things. His fierceness had made the way impassable. He could not be bound, even with a chain. The attempt had often been made, but he had burst the chains and broken the fetters. In this dreadful condition he had fled from the city, and now for a long time infested this mountain burial-place. Night and day he roamed around it, wreaking vengeance on his own poor flesh, "crying and cutting himself with stones." Naked, powerful, and untamable, he made the rocks and tombs ring with his yells. The man was a maniac of the worst type. Convulsive strength, nakedness, and self-mutilation are all well-known symptoms. But his mania was the physical and psychical ground of a far more terrible visitation. We are not to perplex this topic by supposing that, because there was something worse than nature here, there were no natural or second causes at all. This was a madman who had probably brought his disease upon himself by his wickedness, but now there was added to his madness the demoniac element in its extremest form. As in other instances of the same class, the words of our Lord to the man and about him, the recognition, in the most pointed terms, by him of the person and power of Jesus, confirm the impression which the entire record of these cases in the Gospels renders irresistible, that

we have in them a quite peculiar infliction of Satanic tyranny over the souls and bodies of men.

1. *The Miracle itself.* With peculiarly graphic force the case of the poor victim has been described in St. Mark's Gospel; but the three accounts are all express in relating the exact words in which he addressed the Lord, and almost equally detailed in relating the strange accompaniments and sequel of the cure. At a great distance the demoniac had perceived the party; perhaps the noise of their landing had, in that still region, first caught his attention, and he came bounding, as his wont was, to the attack. But on the first look of Jesus his fierceness is changed into awe, and instead of springing upon the company he bows himself at the Lord's feet, and worships. Jesus, in a calm, commanding voice, says to the unclean spirit, "Come out of the man." At this word, with rapid alternation, like that of mania, there bursts forth a most fearful shriek from the unhappy victim. He cried with a loud voice, *What have I to do with Thee*, Jesus, *Thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure Thee by God that Thou torment me not.**

Amid this fearful paroxysm Jesus draws the man into a conversation, asking, as a skilful physician would, his name; seeks, that is, to disentangle his human personality from the complex consciousness, which the victim's strange answer about the legion of evil spirits discloses.† Then follows the request of the man (Mark v. 10), or of the demons (Luke and Matthew expressly;

* So both Mark and Luke in the same words; Matthew in more condensed form, but with the plural number.

† From modern records of psychical derangement many instances of double consciousness may be cited. The Life of Pfarrer Blumhardt, of Boll, in Würtemberg, contains some of the most striking to be met with.

and Mark again, v. 12), that Jesus would not send them out of the country, that "He would not command them to depart into the abyss," but that He would suffer them to enter into a herd of swine, two thousand strong, that was feeding on the mountain from which the man had descended. Permission having been given, or taken, the Lord's command to leave the human victim was at once obeyed. The swine dashed violently down the steep, and were drowned in the lake. Their keepers fled in astonishment to the nearest city. When the townsfolk and dwellers round assembled to see this thing, they found the man who had been noted as the scourge of the whole country, sitting, clothed, and in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus.

2. *The Episode of the Swine.* Stier remarks that expositors of various shades fly from this narrative as if the spirits had entered into them and plunged them in a sea of unbelief. The facts of the case must be steadily borne in mind. First, the confusion of consciousness on the part of the subject colours the narrative. The rapid transitions from the human to the demon mind are evident in its picturesque condensation. The man worships, the demons deprecate ; the man runs to Jesus, the demons entreat Jesus to let them alone. Must we not think that the same commingling of words and actions pervades the whole ? Then, the only word spoken by Jesus at all in this episodic part of the transaction is the one majestic " Depart," recorded in Matthew, which is the word of expulsion. That it is also regarded by the evangelists as a word of permission for what follows is clear enough. But all else is conjecture of commentators. That the sequel was needful in order to make the expulsion visible

to the man himself; or that the swine's destruction was intended to punish the Gadarenes, if they were heathens, for insulting the Jews, if they were Jews for having swine at all, are tasteless irrelevancies which were better omitted. The loss of the unclean animals is part of the fact; but no part of the miracle. It was a mere concomitant, something that happened in connection with it; but, really no more to be considered as the doing of the Healer than the throwing down of the epileptic lad, rending him sore, and leaving him for dead, when the Lord bade the evil spirit depart out of him. The command was obeyed in both cases, though the outgoing tenants strove to do all the mischief they could at their exit. Whether the desire of the demons was thus really attained is open to question. By connecting the miracle with a disagreeable catastrophe, the prejudice of the people was excited against the Redeemer, His mission prevented from going further in this region, and the evil spirits were not sent out of the country, but rather remained in it. So some; but others take the view, on the whole more consonant to the text, that the evil spirits pleaded for some refuge, some local habitation, rather than return to the abyss; that they deemed those unclean animals to be suitable; that in this they deceived themselves; for the swine would not live with such tenants, but rushed into the lake, and sent the dislodged spirits to the very place from which they sought to be preserved.

3. *The Conduct of the Gadarenes.*—"*The whole multitude . . . besought Him to depart from them.*" This is to be ascribed to ignorance and fear rather than to avarice. Otherwise, says Calvin, they would not have besought Jesus to depart, but would have driven Him out. To be more moved by the swine's destruction

than delighted and encouraged by the demoniac's deliverance, discovered the working of natural conscience. The natural mind when unenlightened dreads the approach of the Divine, of the Supernatural, as expecting evil from that source rather than good. The same principle accounts for the way in which many still treat Christ and His grace. There is a mixture of motives. It is not that they reject and disbelieve everything spiritual. It is not that they deliberately conclude for this world and against life eternal. But they stand in awe of anything very real and powerful in religion. They have a notion that there is something in it. But it bewilders and frightens them, and, as they think, bodes them no good. On the other hand, they do understand their own temporal interest. They perceive that spiritual enthusiasm, when honest and real, is likely to interfere with it, and bring about loss. Thus, between the clear view of what they will almost certainly lose by being aroused to spiritual realities, and the covert dread of what gain such arousal may bring, they have no other conclusion than to try to get quietly and decently rid of it. If He would just go away—if these currents of spiritual movement would pass by and leave them alone. So they are of those, still, who "pray Him to depart out of their coasts."

4. *The Gadarene Missionary.*—As the Lord took them at their word, and was mounting on shipboard to return, the saved man interposed, most naturally and humbly clung to his deliverer, and besought that he might go with Him out of that evil place. Jesus had better use for him. "*Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*" He is sent first to his own house and friends. What a

meeting! We can picture them as they stand at the door, or at the village end, and watch his approach; half-believing and half-fearing, while yonder he comes calm, clothed, happy, and full of good news. So let all grace from Christ begin to tell at home. If it cannot win its way there it lacks some of its vital force. Those who for the most part work for Christ away from their own circle, seldom or never within it, betray a consciousness that their influence does not prevail at home, because the change is not fully seen and acknowledged there. "*Shew how great things God hath done unto thee.*" This is the true method of the household missionary. He has a story to tell of personal experience, of marvellous mercy, of grateful love, that he has been himself saved with a great salvation, and has a great Saviour to commend to others. This, in his mouth—and on due occasion all Christ's public servants will employ it as well,—touches men's hearts, and spreads the glory of Jesus. "*He departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.*" The mission was successful, for the worker did exactly at first as the Lord bade him, and he was soon able to do more. The letter of his commission enlarged. He began at home, and then neighbours wanted to hear the story, the people in the next village, soon those in the large towns, till at last he told it to all Decapolis, and became Christ's messenger and herald to the whole region. His doctrine enlarged as well as his diocese. He was to go and celebrate his cure. But he could not tell his story without giving Jesus all the praise, and he found that praising Jesus was giving glory to God, and so he preached a Divine Saviour. "*All men did marvel.*" The most terrible sufferer from infernal

power, in all the record of the Gospels, becomes a preacher of salvation to Ten Cities. Since this district could not bear, at the time, Christ's personal presence, He leaves behind Him a herald of salvation, not without relation to His own subsequent return to it. A majestic entrance of the Sun of Righteousness into a region of the Shadow of Death! For though but a momentary gleam, a ray of light was left there. Jesus went these few hours to Gadara. He found a demoniac and left a missionary.

Other Demoniacs in the Gospel History. The only instances of "possession" in which the personality of the victim comes into any prominence are the one now commented on, and that of the man in the synagogue. The Fathers were in the habit of regarding these two as emblems respectively of the state of Jew and Gentile under sin,—the former unclean, yet quiet and apparently subdued, attending on divine worship; the other fierce and openly raging among the tombs. The Lord proves His power upon both. He is a Saviour for man,—mighty to deliver the Jew from his formal religion and his yoke of bondage,—to rescue, also, the Gentile sold more terribly into the dominion of Satan. That one of our Lord's devoted female followers, Mary of Magdala, had been the subject of His gracious power in this kind is no more than mentioned in the Gospels (cf. Luke viii. 3 with Mark xvi. 9). The healing of the demonised dumb (Matt. ix. 33) forms part of a Capernaum episode, which deserves to be treated as a whole.* It is in connection with the cure of the blind and dumb demoniac (Matt. xii. 22; Luke xi. 14) that the controversy on this topic between Jesus and His enemies reaches its

* See Section XI.

climax. Hardened and maddened by the involuntary exclamation of the multitude on this occasion, "*Is not this the Son of David?*" the Pharisees of Jerusalem brought out their utmost argument, cunningly adapted to entrap a partially enlightened people. 'Yes! no doubt very wonderful. The chiefest of all demons alone could give such power to cast out demons.' Our Lord's reply is given at some length in all the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Mark iii. 22-30 with the other two places last-named). First, He uses the home-thrust drawn from their own practice of exorcism. According to these pretensions their own disciples cast out demons. If so, by whom? Then follows the thought with which He raises the whole controversy to a higher platform. If the moral aspect of this question be left out the whole degenerates into absurdities and superstitions of the Jewish doctrine concerning Satan and his demons. Introduce the moral idea of an evil kingdom, of which man's own sinfulness makes him a thrall till the Deliverer come, then all is clear. Satan cannot cast out Satan, else how shall his kingdom stand? But his casting out shows the finger or spirit of God; and this new thing which Jesus brings in is no other than the kingdom of God. Last of all, He warns these traducers that their evil is not spoken merely against Himself, but against the Holy Spirit of God, and thus verges on that "eternal sin" for which neither here nor hereafter can there be forgiveness.

A closing word on this whole topic. If it be asked, Why were such cases known only at that particular time? and, How account for their entire disappearance since? it must be replied that both these questions proceed upon inaccurate assumption. The sacred

literature does not confine "possession" to the time of our Lord's sojourn on earth. That such phenomena were known before He came is implied in the narratives themselves. There are several instances of possession dealt with by the apostles after His departure. The records of early Christianity bear out the same impression. That such disorders should, indeed, have been peculiarly prevalent in that stage of human history will not appear strange to reflective students of it. If, as Trench has remarked, there was anything that more specially marked the period of our Lord's coming and that immediately succeeding it with an ethical character, it was precisely the wreck and confusion of men's spiritual life,—the disharmony and hopelessness which overtook men who knew not revelation, and the tendency to rush into sensual enjoyments as the refuge from despairing thoughts. The Greek and Roman world was never so beset as then with magicians, soothsayers, and spiritual pretenders of all sorts,—the decay of faith giving place to horrid superstitions. The whole period, in short, was the hour of darkness before the dawn. The night of men's ignorance was about to expire. Is it any wonder that at such a time such soul-maladies as these, such instances of infernal domination, should have specially abounded? * "Why not admit," says Pressensé, "that in this age, which saw the close of a world, a new and strange form of evil was called forth? . . . In a great crisis of history may not this terrible influence have made itself felt in an altogether special manner upon individuals whose minds are already diseased? Psychology has its mysteries as well as

* Trench, *Notes on the Miracles*, pp. 163, 164. Cf. Westcott, *Characteristics, etc.*, pp. 77-81.

metaphysics, and its facts often pass explanation. There is no reason against supposing possession to be a kind of exceptional mental alienation—that is to say, the substitution of a foreign influence for the moral being which lies fettered and bound."*

As to the question, How account for their entire disappearance now? we should, again, have to be quite certain of the facts before attempting to answer. Is it certain that there is no analogy between the terrible facts of evil possession and what modern physicians call "moral insanity"? Is it quite clear that there is no such thing as possession extant still—if we may not say in our penitentiaries and asylums, at least in the depths of heathen darkness, and in the orgies of false religions? We should require to listen to competent medical authorities on the former, and to those long acquainted with heathenism on the latter, of these topics. The whole subject is too obscure for dogmatism on either side. But the plain sense of the sacred narrative seems to carry with it the assumption that there was and can be such a phenomenon as possession—a demonised state, different from madness.†

* *Jesus Christ : His Life, Times, and Work.* Hodder & Stoughton, 1875.

† Those who wish to see both sides of the question should consult Jahn, *Archæologia Biblica*, p. 200 *et seqq.*, English trans., third edition, Oxford, 1836; also the articles on this topic in Winer, *Biblisches Realwörterbuch*, Herzog, *Real Encyclop.* Among recent discussions, see, Prebendary Row, *The Supernatural in the New Testament*, and Edersheim's Appendix XVI. in his *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, who shows successfully that the New Testament writers are not to be charged with the superstitious notions of the Jews on this subject.

X.

THE WOMAN WITH AN ISSUE OF BLOOD.

MATT. ix. 20-2 ; MARK v. 25-34 ; LUKE viii. 43-8.

THIS incident is marked out among our Lord's healings by these two peculiarities: It was a miracle within a miracle; and it was a cure obtained without a word spoken beforehand. All three Synoptists concur in recording this event episodically in the heart of another transaction,—the Raising of the Daughter of Jairus; and the two whose notes of time are clearest place the combined occurrence in immediate consecution to the return from Gadara. The people had recognised His returning vessel, and lining the shore near Capernaum, were waiting for Him, and received Him gladly. No sooner has He set foot on land, than He is called to go on an errand of mercy, and finds another merciful work to do on the road. The power of Jesus not only flows out, but overflows and dispenses blessings by the way. The crumbs that fall from His Table are better than the feasts of other masters. It was also a healing granted without any previous conversation. In this it was exceptional. He usually talked with the patient or with those interested in the case before He wrought the cure. In these colloquies we have found varied and fruitful illustrations of

the nature, origin, and growth of faith. This story, as much as any, illustrates faith, though it does so in a fresh and original way. The faith of this woman was so fearless, prompt, and resolute, that without question or explanation, before a word had been spoken, she believes, resolves, acts. She has snatched the blessing, and is only not permitted to steal it. For He would not let her go until He had obtained a confession of her faith and an account of her cure from her own lips. Thus, though the conversation was not held till the cure had been wrought, the exception confirmed the rule on which He acted, that, apart from faith, and the acknowledgment of faith, there could be no blessing.

An old writer has said that in the words with which this story ends our Lord Jesus puts a remarkable honour upon faith. He seems to take the crown off His own head and put it on the head of Faith. For He does not say, 'My power,' but, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." He had good reasons for speaking as He did on this occasion. There were some defects in the woman's way of thinking about the Healer,—not to be wondered at when we consider how very partial must have been the knowledge of Him she possessed. There were also some peculiarities in her own case, which disposed her to hide the whole transaction. But Christ permits no false shame on the part of His patients to rob either their faith or His power of the appropriate honour. Had the woman been suffered to go away without acknowledging the source and manner of her healing she might have attributed the cure, on His part, to a magical virtue that flowed unconsciously and involuntarily from His Person; and on her part, to physical contact rather than believing

trust. But He turns on her with a conscious and loving explanation. He said, 'No! it was not chance nearness to My body in the crowd that wrought the cure; it was not the touch of My garment's hem. It was the dealing of thy soul with thy Saviour,—a vital and spiritual transaction, "*Thy faith hath made thee whole.*"' This is, on the forefront of it, what the incident has to teach us, viz., that faith is a reasonable and intelligible thing. Christ by His words here would have all men take notice that His healing is no magical or mesmeric transaction; that it is neither by chance nor by charm that diseases are removed and souls are saved, but in a way free and open to all sufferers and sinners. For there is no risk of our attaching undue moment to faith, or of its usurping aught of the Saviour's honour, if we observe what it really is, as illustrated in this instance. It is simply a strong and reasonable persuasion of Christ's power, issuing in an immediate and practical recourse to Him. If He puts the crown of peace and assurance on the head of faith, such faith when examined puts the crown back again on the head of Jesus, and says, "To Him be all the glory." Two things in the narrative especially claim our attention: the woman's confidence in Christ and Christ's action towards her.

1. *The woman's faith in the Saviour, its strength and its weakness.*—Tradition makes her a resident, not at Capernaum, but at Paneas, or Cesarea Philippi, who had wandered to Galilee, seeking relief from her trouble. Two brazen statues, supposed to commemorate the miracle, existed at that place in the time of Eusebius (fourth century), and were seen by him as he records.* Another Church historian, a century later, describes the

* *Eccles. Hist.* vii. 18.

destruction of the same monument by order of the Emperor Julian.* These notices, otherwise not of much value, confirm the impression suggested, even by the sacred narrative, that she was a stranger to the district where she was healed. This woman put herself in His way on this eventful occasion, and thus proved the strength of her faith. She had most likely never seen Him before, had never heard Him speak, had never beheld one of His miracles. In these circumstances it would not have been surprising, after all she had suffered and spent, through her wasting disease and her physicians together, had she thought of coming to the Galilean Healer as a forlorn hope. On the contrary, she not only had hope so much as led her to think it worth while to make the journey, but she had somehow gathered a strong persuasion of His ability, such that she said to her neighbours, to herself, or to both, "*If I may touch but His clothes I shall be whole.*" Nor was the persuasion arbitrary or fanatical. It was simple and generous, but it was thoroughly reasonable, because justified by facts. It was when she had "*heard the things concerning Jesus*" † that she came to Him. What these were we can suppose. His fame as a Healer of diseases was now spread through all Syria. His uniform tenderness to the poor was noted. Some of the "gracious words" that proceeded out of His mouth were no doubt current among the common people who heard Him gladly. For this woman it was enough. She was filled with a belief that He was able to heal even her. She never seems to have

* Sozomen, *Hist. Eccles.*, v. 21.

† Mark v. 27 (R.V.), τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. The addition of τὰ in the Revisers' Greek is an improvement on the *Textus Receptus*.

doubted for a moment her right to take the cure if she could get it. Such a Saviour should not come within arm's length of her, but she would stretch out her hand for the blessing. Though she should have to press her way through the crowd to reach Him she would touch Him and be healed.

No doubt there were defects in this faith. Its strength and weakness lay close together. It had the defect, so to say, of its quality. Its promptness may have owed something to the mechanical or material conception of the Healer's power, as if it were some atmosphere that surrounded Him, or some magical influence that flowed even from His garments. The swift and secret touch was directed perhaps to the sacred fringe of His Jewish robe, in which, with a superstitious fondness, the healing power was thought specially to reside.* But even so. "Happily it was not the imaginations of her head that were to cure her, but the faith she harboured in her heart, and this was evident and pleasing to her Lord." † The confidence she had in Jesus was typical in that it was strong and well-founded. That it was mixed with those other elements from which the Lord proceeds immediately to purify it may teach us a double lesson. It hints, on

* Not that it was altogether superstition, for there was a moral significance in the hem of the garment. "Over the close-fitting tunic Jesus most probably wore the square outer garment, or *Tallith* with the customary fringes (*Zizith*) of four long white threads with one of hyacinth colour knitted together on each of the four corners" (Edersheim). "Two of these fringes usually hung down at the bottom of the robe; one hung over the shoulder when the robe was folded round the person. This was probably the κράσπεδον which the woman touched, as not requiring she should stoop down in the thick-moving crowd" (Farrar). See, however, the full and guarded statement of Edersheim.

† Olshausen, *On the Gospels*, ii. 11.

the one hand, how small a part of Gospel truth may save the soul if there be faith to receive and love to act upon it. The spiritual value of faith is not to be reckoned by the correctness of conception on which it rests. Yet, on the other hand, the trust which is well-founded and generous will meet with its reward in a rapid and progressive enlightenment through Christ's word and spirit.

For let us note next that this faith, as it was buoyant in persuasion, was prompt and immediate in action. She "*came in the crowd behind*, and touched *His garment*." And it was as immediate in its success. Mark says, "*Straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up*." Luke, in language less rhetorical and more exact, "*Immediately the issue of her blood was stanched*." There followed also another swift consequence. Jesus, Himself, at once distinguished the believing touch from all common stare and pressure of the throngs around Him, and astonished His disciples by singling it out. The incident has ever been a favourite and piquant analogue for the effects of living faith in Christ as contrasted with mere professed or traditional adherence to Him. As that day in the streets of Capernaum many pressed Him, but one touched Him, so is it still.* Why it is so this story may instruct us. This woman came at once to the vital touch, because she was so convinced of her disease and its danger. But so many nominal followers of Christ are trying to persuade themselves that their disease is not fatal. She was quite done with all other physicians, and broken off from them. But many of us have not yet been conclusively shut up to Christ. This woman

* *Illi premunt ista tetigit*," "*Caro premit, fides tangit*," are the exquisite phrases of Augustine.

went straight to Jesus so soon as she heard that He was nigh. But so many among us are waiting for the "convenient season." She made the most inconvenient season serve her turn. The Healer was on His way elsewhere. Jairus and the disciples were hurrying Him along. It was the worst time and place for such an invalid. But it was hers, for it was given her of God; she made the best of it, and was saved. Some of our hearers say their difficulties are peculiar. There is nothing in ordinary preaching, in the common statements of the Gospel, that meets their case and relieves their perplexities. They are waiting for some clearer light, for some more special agency. This woman's case was peculiar. She was by Jewish law unclean. She could not repair to the synagogue where so many met Jesus and were healed. She could not stand up before the Healer in a public audience and tell her case and get His hands laid on her, as so many did. The ordinary mode of even these Healing miracles would not have met her need. So she got her health, in the crush of a street procession, by stealing behind Him, and pressing with the energy of hope till her fingers grasped His garment; for she was fully persuaded that, peculiar as was her case, she should find in Him an appropriate and certain cure. Those who in their soul-search for spiritual health follow her example will be as successful and as blessed as was she.

2. *The Saviour's Action towards the Woman, its Wisdom and Tenderness.*—The critical point in this miracle is that at first sight it seems "as if it had been wrought outside the consciousness and will of Jesus."* It is eminently an instance of healing by contact. But whereas healings by touch, on His part, accompanied

* Godet, *in loc.*

with other actions and with speech, are frequent, and whereas cure by touching Him is elsewhere referred to in mere general terms,* in this instance alone it looks as if it had taken place without previous concurrence of His at all. The dilemma of explanation lies between conceiving of the cure as done entirely without His will, therefore magical and mechanical, unlike all His other gracious works; or importing the notion of a concealed consciousness on His part, which gives an uncandid effect to the subsequent conversation. Godet supplies the idea that in each of Jesus' miracles there are, as it were, two poles,—the receptivity of the subject and the activity of the worker. That whereas, in some cases, receptivity is languid and the Lord's conscious action is most intense, here it is the reverse. The active faith of the sufferer, as it were, takes the blessing by storm, though from One who is always willing to bless. He was not, indeed, unconscious of the virtue He put forth, nor of the faith which received it. But to bring that faith into clearness and purity it was necessary to bring the subject herself into conscious and open relation to her Healer. On this principle the occurrence may be conceived of thus: As He is being hurried along the narrow and crowded street, jostled by the eager throng who are watching the issue of the Ruler's application, the Lord becomes suddenly aware of an outgoing of His power in response to an act of faith, equally quick and bold. He straightway turns round, and puts the question which amazed the disciples, and drew forth Simon's characteristic remonstrance. But Jesus re-asserts the fact with peculiar emphasis, "Somebody *hath* touched Me." Searching the crowd around, and hitherto behind, Him, His gaze

* Matt. xiv. 36; Mark iii. 10, vi. 56.

falls on one female form comparatively young. The face, if Eastern dress let it be a moment seen, told its tale. The thin and pinched features, the pallor of habitual ill-health, helped, perhaps, to single it out. But now there mingles in it the glow of instantaneous success, and the blush of womanly sensibility. She knew instantly that she was healed. She felt in that moment how far her sanguine boldness had carried her. She perceived, indeed, that nothing was hid from her Healer, but also that His mien was as gracious as His person was mighty. Knowing that her touch had involved the risk of defilement for Him,—saint and rabbi, as to her He was,—but believing that in His power it was now all swallowed up and cancelled, she came forward at His word. What look of His met hers we can imagine. A rare delight filled His countenance—a foretaste of the joy set before Him—at the signal proof of confidence given by this poor lone woman. This sunshine of His face, added to the joy of her own success, gave her courage to tell Him *all the truth*, both *for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately.* The avowal cost her not a little. She came "*fearing and trembling*" as she "*fell down before Him*," and made her confession "*before all the people*." But it was richly rewarded. "*Daughter*," He said, "*be of good cheer*." No one in all the Gospel story was ever addressed by Him with this tender appellation but herself. All three evangelists have recorded the term as if they marked the special honour it implied. And, then, in the added words, He clears her faith to her own mind, He confirms her cure as a permanent healing, and He claims to be Himself the knowing and willing Author of it all.

We can see why, for His own sake, and His work's

sake, Jesus had to make this cure public. But we are also to note how good it was for the subject of it herself. She did not mean, perhaps, to "filch the blessing." Her failing leaned to virtue's side. She deemed it not worth while to have Him stop for her, when He was in such urgency, and stand and speak the healing. One quiet touch would do all she needed. Had she been allowed to slip away without the public scene, she would have lost two things: the honour of confessing her faith, and of having her cure confirmed. He drew her out of her privacy that He might crown her faith with His great encomium, "*Thy faith hath saved thee;*" and that He might remove all fear that the cure would fail, or the disease relapse, "*Go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.*" Reserve was her fault, a wish to hide the cure; thus at once cheating her own self of comfort, and withholding from the Lord His due honour. He corrects that fault most gently and wisely. He does not insist upon publicity till the healing had taken place, thus making confession as easy as possible for her. The object of its publication then becomes apparent, viz., to show that the medium of the cure was faith, not physical contact; to confirm what she had already taken by His own pronounced bestowal of it, and to bring her out in grateful acknowledgment both for His glory and her good.

There are Christians whose fault is reserve. They would be saved, as it were, by stealth. The Saviour will not have it so. True conversion, no doubt, is first of all a secret transaction very close and personal between the soul and Christ. But because it is so, it cannot remain so. The virtue which is gone out of Him is a savour which cannot be hid. A seen religion is not always real, but a real religion is always

seen. We cannot claim Christ for ours but He will also declare His part in the blessed bond, and have us acknowledge that we are His. "To confess with the mouth" is an essential part of the salvation which comes by believing with the heart. Indeed, it is the consummation of it. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." This is the private justification of the man before God. "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." This crowns the transaction. It is more than its mere publication, namely, its perfection. The salvation is neither comforting nor complete until it is openly acknowledged.* Is this why there are so many comfortless Christians?—unassured, unconfirmed, as well as uncomforted. They are to be Christ's followers so modestly and quietly that no one shall know of them. Let them take heed lest He also should be unaware of them, and have to say sorrowfully at the last, "I never knew you."

* See Augustine's picturesque story of the conversion of Victorinus, the Roman rhetorician. *Confessions*, viii. 3, 4, 5.

XI.

TWO BLIND MEN, AND A DUMB DEMON.

MATT. ix. 27-38.

THIS passage of the history is peculiar to St. Matthew. It closes with one of those general paragraphs in which the miracles and ministry of the Lord are strikingly summed up. Besides, it contains two of what may be called the minor miraculous incidents. These are described in the fewest words, but with peculiar beauty. Crowded into a little space of the narrative, they are full of individual interest, like the subordinate groups of a great historical painting. What wealth inexhaustible there must have been in His life, when His bye-walks and spare hours were filled up with deeds like these! If we are to follow the apparent note of time given in this Gospel, He is just returning to the house of His disciples in Capernaum, from the home of Jairus. One stirring event had followed, that day, on the heels of another; a leisure moment had surely now arrived; but no! still another claim upon His compassion.

ver. 27. *When Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed Him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.*—This is the earliest in the notable group of such cases in the Gospels. After this one,

their occurrence in order of time appears to be, the cure of the "possessed" who was blind and dumb (Matt. xii. 22), that of the man whose eyes were opened at Bethsaida Julias (Mark viii. 22), that of the man sent to Siloam—distinguished as a cure of congenital blindness (John ix.), and that of Bartimeus and his companion near Jericho (in all the Synoptists). We are reminded by these instances of the great frequency of blindness in Eastern countries. From causes connected with the climate, with the soil, with the customs of the people, severe and destructive forms of ophthalmic inflammation are far more common than with us. To these have to be added the causes which in every country make us familiar with this pathetic form of human infirmity. The blind had the attention and sympathy of Jesus in the days of His flesh, and for no one class of physical sufferers has the spirit of His gospel done more in all the lands to which it has penetrated. Our Lord's cures of blindness are also specially noted in the Gospels as making for the proof of His Christhood. The two men here and the two at Jericho call Jesus by a name not often used, but to the Jew expressly significant of the Messiah. "Thou Son of David," they said, "have mercy on us." When He cast out the demon from one blind and dumb the people said, "Is not this the Son of David?" The result of the cure of the man born blind was a demonstration of His claim publicly conducted before His enemies in Jerusalem. This class of miracles carried with it evidence peculiarly conclusive to the mind of the Jew, no doubt because it had been prominently asserted in the prophets as one of the marks of Messiah and His times, that by Him "the eyes of the blind should see out of obscurity and darkness." The spiritual

propriety of this prominence is obvious. Blindness is a constant Bible figure for man's moral incapacity in things Divine which persists even in the face of God's revelation. The removal of blindness was a peculiarly appropriate type of the mission of Jesus, of His coming to be the Light of the World and to give to those who follow Him the Light of Life.

ver. 28. *And when He was come into the house, the blind men came to Him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this?*—The faith of these men proved its strength by its importunity. They had followed Him along the street, crying after Him; now they pushed their way into the house. They would take no denial, at least, no silent one. So He puts them to a further test. His early cures had been wrought almost without solicitation. Now that evidences were multiplied, the kingdom recognised, a proportionate expression of faith is expected. Hence the question intended to bring out their desire in a definite form. There was no previous instance of opening blind eyes, at least, none is recorded. Do ye believe, He asked, in My power and its sufficiency for your particular need? Faith is a full and firm acceptance of Christ's ability in general and for our own peculiar instance. This element of faith is primal and fundamental. It is its ground-tone; yet easily overlooked or undervalued, because taken for granted. 'You believe that "He is able." You never doubted it, would never presume to question it.' Yes! but does it possess your thoughts? Does it fill your soul? Does it fire your resolution and make you forget yourself? Was Abraham the prince of Old Testament believers—the father of the faithful? Here is the description of Abraham's faith, "He was strong in faith, giving glory

to God, being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform."* Was Paul foremost among New Testament saints? Note how he expresses his trust in his closing days, with the sword and the crown of martyrdom before him. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."† This is not only the ground-tone of faith, it is its vital hue—the proof of its life—the appropriating and active element. The Lord's test applied to it, is not how much we believe, what articles are in our creed, but whether we trust Him as able to do for us this very thing now in hand. Do we believe that He is able to open our blind eyes, soften our hard heart, conquer our stubbornest lust, keep us through and through to the end? That 'Christ is able,' why it is one of those familiar verities whose greatness hides them from our view. Like the vast blue dome above us, we know it is there always. We walk free under its canopy, safe by its light, but seldom "lift up our eyes" to its depths and riches. To acquiesce in the belief that "He is able" is hardly worth calling faith. It is certainly not faith in exercise. Let us look up into the heaven of His redeeming power. Let us fasten our gaze upon star after star of promise in its sureness, and for each, as we need it, believe that He is, "able to make all grace abound," "able to succour them that are tempted," "able to keep us from falling," "able to save to the uttermost," "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

"*They say unto Him, Yea, Lord.*" (ver. 29) "*Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it done unto you*" (R.V.).—They had proved their faith, now they simply and frankly confess it, and He imme-

* Rom. iv. 20, 21. † 2 Tim. i. 12.

diately and generously honours it. He touched their eyes, for this was His usual and appropriate mode of conveying through another sense His personal action in the cure of blindness. And then He proclaims Faith's charter. He pronounces it free of the treasure house of His grace. Whatever you need, only believe for it; whatever the boon, only believe Him able and willing, and it is yours. Faith is itself nothing, yet links "man's emptiness to Christ's fulness," and avails for everything.

vv. 30, 31. *And . . . Jesus straitly charged them. . . . But they spread abroad His fame in all that country.* —This is a good instance of the diversity of treatment needed as to the proclamation of the miracles. He gives almost threatening charges of silence in this case and in that of Jairus' daughter recorded in this context; and yet in the intervening story of the woman who touched Him the treatment is reversed. The reason is plain. Otherwise hers would have been not so much a quiet cure as one lost and buried. She who touched in secret, was made to confess openly. These two men, who cried after Him in the street, were blessed privately in the house and sent quietly away. Moreover, this treatment fell in with the Lord's general course at this time. Notoriety of miraculous working among those who had already seen so much of it, would only have fostered the false view of His Christhood which was rising, and would have interfered with His leisure to teach. Henceforth, for a time, the miracles are not so frequent, and more space is given in the narrative to His doctrine. Such is the key to these charges of silence. His design was to prevent the people from being misled by the mere report of them, to avert their deluded violence of enthusiasm, or His enemies' urgency of hate.

Yet plainly the deeds themselves were not meant to be hid, for the recollection and the record of them has not failed even in the case of such as those before us, which might have been counted of less moment. The question has been discussed whether we should blame or praise these two men, who, despite the Saviour's words, spread His fame. Trench notes the curious fact that all his Romish authorities, and most of the patristic, applaud or excuse, while Protestant commentators see here a fault, "even though it were one into which only grateful hearts could have fallen."

vv. 32, 33. *And as they went forth, behold, there was brought to Him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb man spake.*— No sooner are the blind men restored and gone out, than a fresh party entered, bringing another case. Surely He bare our infirmities and carried our sicknesses. This was one "possessed," and in consequence, both deaf and dumb, as the one word used properly signifies. Apparently the demonic element here is the ruling one. The case is so described as to distinguish it from an ordinary case of dumbness. There was no organic defect. The mental and moral causes only of the disorder had to be removed, and "the dumb spake." Our Lord dealt with the cause, struck at the root, by casting out the demon. In like manner He treats our spiritual maladies. Dealing with symptoms only will never please any good doctor. Nor does it satisfy our Great Physician. A clean heart is what He promises first. Then, all thoughts, words and acts shall be clean. The evil spirit He will first expel, and then the liberated soul will express itself to God as well as hear His voice. It will no more be deaf and dumb. "Behold he prayeth." This miracle produced a great impression.

Why so, we may easily understand. The Jewish rabbis and teachers practised exorcism. They professed to cast out evil spirits. They did perhaps produce effects of a noticeable kind on nervously disturbed persons. But a deaf and dumb "possessed" person was beyond their reach. They could do nothing with such a case. They could not address the man. He was beyond the scope of any influences which they could bring to bear. Jesus Himself explains to the disciples in another case, where "possession" is ascribed to a "dumb spirit," that such were peculiarly hard even for faith to deal with.* Here, then, was an instance of Jesus' power specially fitted to impress the people, and it also specially exasperated the hostility of His enemies. "*The multitude marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.*" The first Gospel at this point closes a narrative which contains ten of our Lord's miracles related in close consecution. It sums up in a sentence countless unrecorded acts of the same sort, which He did as He went about teaching, preaching, and healing all manner of disease and sickness. Then it adds a paragraph which prepares the way for a new section of the history. Hitherto Jesus has laboured chiefly in the home country of Galilee, near the Lake, and has been Himself the sole Preacher of the Kingdom. Henceforth His work takes a wider range, and He associates the Twelve with Him, both as heralds and as healers.

* St. Mark ix. 29.

XII.

THE SYRO-PHŒNICIAN WOMAN.

MATT. xv. 21-28; MARK vii. 24-30.

THE first thing to note here is the change, at this point, in the scene and circumstances of our Lord's miracles. Last chapter recorded the close of the stated Galilean ministry, which had its centre at Capernaum. The "year of success," as it has been called, was ended. The "year of opposition" was now begun. His labours consist henceforth of a succession of tours or journeys. The section immediately before us may be named the mission to North Galilee, or, more accurately, Outer Galilee, as contrasted with His ministry in the central districts near the Sea of Tiberias. In these and the following passages of the Gospels mention is made of Tyre and Sidon in the north-west, of Cesarea Philippi in the north, of Decapolis on the east and south-east of the Lake. These were the outskirts of Palestine, so that Galilee of the Gentiles was not left unvisited by Jesus. May we not suppose one reason for this journey to have been, that in His own person He might sketch in outline the missionary plan which He left His apostles to fill up? For, as He charged His messengers, so He Himself "began at Jerusalem," was early at Samaria, did most of His

miracles and gave much of His teaching in Galilee, and now went to the "uttermost parts of the land," entering at least the borders of heathendom.

We are, further, expressly told that one object of this tour was retirement, both because of the crisis His work in Galilee had reached, and for the sake of His disciples. He had not found this retirement by withdrawing to the eastern shores of the Lake, for He had been followed thither by crowds of people. But now the passover companies—no longer fed with miraculous bread—had gone up to Jerusalem. Many even of His own followers had been scared by His faithful words in the synagogue of Capernaum. He now, therefore, departs quietly with His disciples into the half-heathen country to the north of Palestine proper, where He "desires to be hid." Even there, however, as the sequel shows, His fame had preceded Him; and He has soon to move onwards to similar outlying regions. During the whole tour the miracles recorded—each of them striking and full of character—are nevertheless few. In the district of Tyre and Sidon only the one before us; in Decapolis, the Cure of one Deaf and Dumb; towards the north-east of the Lake, the Feeding of Four Thousand, and near Bethsaida Julias, in the same region, the Restoration to Sight of a Blind Man; upon his return from Cesarea Philippi, the Transfiguration and the Healing of the Epileptic. The curative works of this group fall now to be considered in their order.

Our present story is the first of these. In regard to the principal subject of it, the mother of the possessed child, let us note, first:

Her person.—She was a "woman of Canaan, a Syrophœnician by nation." That is to say, by her descent she was a Gentile of the Gentiles, for she was sprung

of those original inhabitants of Canaan whom Israel received commission to exterminate. The Gospel does not blot out differences of race, and there have been, even under its sway, favoured and foremost races. But it proves its fitness for man as such, by winning trophies of grace out of all races. She is also called a "Greek," implying that she was by religion a pagan. She was not even so much as a Grecian or proselyte, and is perhaps the only example of a heathen being directly blessed by our Lord Himself in the flesh; for the Centurion of Capernaum was obviously already a convert to the Jewish faith. Here, then, is an early gleam of the "justifying of the uncircumcision through faith." "For Christ to throw the devil out of a Canaanite was very like the white banner of Christ's love to the nations, and the King's royal standard set up to gather in the heathen under his colours." *

Her case.—It was not her own, but her little daughter's. Yet she makes it her own in the words of her touching petition, "*Have mercy on me.*" Anxiety about her child brought her to Jesus. "*My daughter is grievously vexed with a demon.*" † There were degrees of that misery, and this was of the worst sort. St. Mark says the young girl had or was held by an unclean spirit. This clearly puts the case into the same category as that of the boy brought by his father to the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration. The theory which would attribute "possession" always to moral causes in the subjects of it, will not cover these instances. Young people of that age could not be among the

* Samuel Rutherford. *The Trial and Triumph of Faith*,—his well-known twenty-seven sermons on this narrative. (F. C. Assembly's edition, 1845, p. 24.)

† κακῶς δαιμονίζεται, Matt. xv. 22.

desperately wicked in whom Satan ruled through their own evil will. Some terrible physical or hereditary malady was the seat or organ of the demonic power. This sad burden, then, the woman brings on her heart to Jesus. His coming within range of her residence stirred up perhaps long dormant hope. She had come from her Phœnician home, probably some distance, found the house of those Jewish friends with whom Jesus sought shelter and privacy, and with the boldness of a mother's love and of an importunate faith preferred her request.

Her address.—It was very earnest. "*She cried unto Him.*" "*She came and fell down at His feet, and besought Him that He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter*" (Mark vii. 25, 26). But it is Matthew that records here the pivot word—"She cried, saying, Have mercy on me, *O Lord, thou Son of David.*" This distinctively Jewish appellation used by her shows that she was to appeal to Him as Israel's Messiah. She could not, at first at least, be supposed to see the world-wide bearing of His Messianic claim. There was probably in her mind no perception of any claim on her own part except her need, no clear expectation, but some desperate hope that One who was spiritual King of the Jews would bestow on her, in passing, this boon. From this point of view what follows will be no longer thought of as device or pretended refusal on His part, but a straightforward and worthy leading on to the higher ground from whence He could consistently grant her request.

Her reception.—And here we note, first: The silence of Jesus. "*He answered her not a word.*" This is certainly very unusual. We have never met anything like it in His dealings with His patients and suppliants. At the first word they are usually healed. Some of

them were even applied to by Him, to let Him heal them: "Wilt thou be made whole?" Even when He did not at the first asking work the cure, He put some question or made some statement which led up to it. But here is absolute silence; not as yet a refusal, but the lips usually so ready with kindness and mercy are dumb. Then we have the intercession of the Twelve. "*And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.*" The meeting was evidently in the street, or if in the house, she followed them out to the street. His silence did not damp her importunity, for she pressed on, repeated her request, ran and cried after Him. At this point the disciples intercede. They seem more merciful than the Master! They assign a plausible reason for their intercession. 'It was your wish, Master, to be quiet here. Now she will raise the town and the whole country-side upon us, and all the sick folks and possessed and maimed will presently be brought, and we shall be as busy as at Capernaum. Besides, she is troublesome; send her away.' Could we have a more perfect illustration of some of Christ's own parables, such as, 'The Unjust Judge,' and 'The Friend at Midnight'? Man will answer an importunate and persevering prayer, not from unmixed kindness, but partly from selfishness. How much more the God of all grace! Be earnest! Be often! Be importunate in prayer! Take no refusal; you will get none from Him. The compassion of the disciples was a seeming compassion; the silence of Jesus a seeming harshness. They would have her answered to be rid of her; but He delays the answer with a Divine, "much more" of mercy and abounding grace in which He means to bless.

His reply to the Twelve.—"*But He answered and said, I*

am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This was the real reason. His silence was no feint. His delay was no pretence. He explains to the disciples that He cannot be cajoled nor teased into going beyond His commission. He has none to do miracles among the heathen. "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers."* He was acting upon principle, therefore, in being silent to this woman, though He afterwards treats her case as an exception. It is an exception which confirms the principle. When Jesus Christ, the crucified, is risen and ascended, then shall He be preached to all nations, races, and classes of men. Under His Gospel there shall "neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free."† But so long as Jesus of Nazareth is exercising His personal ministry, so long as He is Himself the preacher, it is to the Jew only He is sent. It is a blessed word that He is "sent" to any. He loves the word. Forty-four times He uses it. "I am not come of Myself, but He that sent Me is true." That He is come to the Jew first, is a pledge that He shall be preached by and by to all. But meanwhile He is true to His Father's commission. He anticipates not the Divine plan and order. He is the obedient son. The Jews had rejected Him, yet they are "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" to whom He is sent.

As He thus gave His reason Jesus probably stood still. A look of benevolence and compassion, no doubt, filled His face as He was speaking. Perhaps the woman drew encouragement from the quiet reasonableness of His answer. It was not caprice, nor pride, nor harshness, but duty and obedience on His part that

* Rom. xv. 8. † Col. iii. 11.

explained the answer now; hence, also, the silence before. Here, therefore, her faith found something to which to cling. She pressed to His feet. She fell down there. She came and worshipped Him, saying, now with quiet sobs, as before with uplifted cries, "*Lord, help me!*"

Up to this moment He had been silent to her. He had spoken only to the disciples. Now He admits her another step by turning to her and speaking. "*But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.*" It is no satisfactory rendering of these words to say, Jesus uses the contemptuous language of the Jews for the purpose of conversational fence. Nor does it seem proper to parallel this story, with wrestling Jacob or with parleying Joseph, far less with the Divine withdrawals of that God Who "hides a smiling face behind a frowning Providence." That Providence did so deal with this woman is admitted. That God in Christ, if you will, did so deal with her is true and certain, but to suppose that the man Christ Jesus does in this conversation deal otherwise than simply and openly in His statements and reasons, would be repulsive to every mind. The words are not a mere apparent refusal. Taken along with the sentence just spoken to the disciples about His own commission—they will bear only one meaning as addressed to the woman, 'Though you call Me Son of David, yet you are not of Israel, and to them am I sent. It is children's bread I have to give, and you are not of the family circle, but outside. It is not meet to throw the children's bread to dogs.' Two things break the seeming harshness of the word, and these her faith quickly apprehends. He uses not the ordinary word for dogs, which would have suggested the large wild dogs of Eastern cities,—masterless scavengers,

prowling round streets and walls in gangs for plunder. He says, "Little dogs," using a word denoting those which Roman customs had introduced into Palestine in our familiar Western manner of treating the animal as a domestic favourite. Further, He indicates that the distinction between Jew and Gentile was only for a time endorsed by Him. Soon the whole Gentile world would get access to the table; at present, it was not ready. "*Let the children* first *be filled*."

So her answer was founded upon His own words. "*Truth, Lord! Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.*" * She takes not the least exception to them; on the contrary, she draws the sweetest meaning with perfect logic out of their seeming bitterness. 'Truth, Lord! "Dog" I am, unclean, unworthy. What, then, though I be? Men show kindness to dogs; masters, at least, do to their own. And it is the Master I am dealing with.' "If she were a dog, she was His dog; and it cannot be ill with us if we stand in the meanest relation to Christ."† Or, again, thus; 'Truth, Lord! It may not be meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. The time has not come for full and equal admission of all Gentiles to Jewish blessings. But even before the meal is over, the dogs under the table get crumbs.‡ This is all I ask, an exception. Thou hast thyself made it so. Thou hast come within a Gentile's reach. There is a rule or a law

* "*Yea, Lord; for even the dogs*, etc." R.V., is an improvement which the Vulgate had anticipated, "*Utique, Domine! nam et catelli*, etc." The connecting particles are affirmative, not adversative.

† Matt. Henry.

‡ Trench and others suggest that by "the crumbs" more may be meant than that which falls accidentally to the ground. For it was the custom during eating to use instead of a napkin the soft white part of the bread, which, having thus used, they threw to the dogs.

against me; be it so. Thy mercy breaks through all bounds and rules,—the bread falls from a full and bounteous table, and the children are none the poorer. The blessing has come my way and I must have it, dog though I be.' "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me."

Whatever foothold she may have found in Jesus' words, we can never but admire the wit and wisdom of her answer. "Grace is a witty and understanding spirit, ripe and sharp. . . . Faith is thus pregnant, as to draw saving conclusions from hard principles, and to extract the spirit of the promises."* Doubtless He gave her the occasion, and did so meaningly and lovingly. But how cordial her trust in Him! How clear her insight into the heart of Jesus! How humble and how bold her faith, that even out of that word "dogs," which would have sent most away in anger or despair, she extracted an argument that could not be answered. So the wit and truth and boldness of her faith got the victory. She took the word that sounded like a refusal and a reproach, and turned it into an implicit assent. Jesus rejoiced to be so overcome. "*O woman, great is Thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt. For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.*" Like the only other in the Gospels whose faith Jesus called great, she believed that nearness or distance made no difference to His power, that He had only to "speak the word" and the cure was done, and so went her way home in perfect confidence. When she was come to her house, she "*found the child laid upon the bed and the demon gone out.*"†

* Rutherford, *ut supra*, p. 180.

† This is the reading of Alford, Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, with several others. The Revisers have adopted it.

Faith is the great equaliser. When it is made plain that not race or Church connection, not ritual observance but simple personal recourse to Christ, brings God and His grace into our life, an immense spiritual revolution has been effected. All races of men and every human being are declared to be free and equal in relation to God's best gift to mankind. In these acts and words of His, Jesus Himself was preparing the way for what St. Paul so soon was to preach. He singles out for His praise of their great faith precisely the two among those He blessed, who were Gentiles; and these, as has been ingeniously suggested, represented respectively the two divisions of the Gentile world,—the Roman centurion, a child of Japheth; this Caananite mother, a daughter of Ham. Thus taking the Jews as representing the other Semitic races, our Lord saw during His own ministry the seed-corn of the entire Catholic Church in her African, Western and Eastern branches.* At all events, there is here forestalled what has had so often to be re-proclaimed since, that salvation by faith is the water-mark of Christianity, that which proves it to be the supreme and universal religion. This faith was great—(1) In overcoming obstacles. Its greatness, as Trench says, was of the same order in this respect as that of the Paralytic let through the roof, and of Blind Bartimeus. These were three mighties. The first overcame physical hindrances; the second, hindrances opposed by his fellow-men; this woman, more heroically than all, those presented by Christ Himself — silence, exclusion, and apparent

* So Archer Butler, *Sermons*, First Series, 1859, Sermon xi.: "The Canaanite mother a type of the Gentile Church." But modern ethnologists, while allowing the old Canaanite tribes to have been of Ham, make the Phœnicians certainly Semitic.

reproach. (2) It was implicit trust in Christ's word for the instantaneous cure of her absent child. In this respect it was of the same order as that of the Courtier at Cana and the Centurion at Capernaum, only greater in degree than even the last. In these healings granted to believing prayer for another, faith shows peculiarly generous and noble. Jesus hails its appearance with a corresponding and surpassing generosity; at once avails Himself of it, that it may conduct as with lightning flash the blessing to the absent sufferer, and assures the trustful suppliant that the cure is done. (3) It was great in spiritual tact. This is the characteristic excellence on which, doubtless, the Lord's special encomium here rested. If we are right in our exposition of His action in the case, that it was not feigned refusal, but a needful process by which alone at that point in His mission a soul outside of Israel could be led to Christ, then, the greatness of her faith lay in the quick-witted tact with which the woman perceived and accepted her relationship to the world's Redeemer. Just as good sense is a right feeling for reality in the common world of our everyday life, faith is a right feeling for the spiritually and eternally real. It is the trustful willingness to accept our due relation to our Saviour God. With His leading, this believing spirit saw all in their right places—the Master, the children, and the dogs. Taking at once the lowest room, her faith won the highest praise, and forestalled the day of a universal gospel.

XIII.

THE DEAF MAN OF DECAPOLIS.

MARK vii. 31—end.

THIS incident befell upon our Lord's return journey from the scene of the preceding story. Leaving the borders of Tyre and Sidon, He kept still to the outlying districts of the country,—on this occasion, those to the north-east and east of the sea of Galilee. Then travelling on towards the lake, He passed through the coasts of Decapolis. During this progress a great gathering took place on a mountain somewhere in that neighbourhood. Multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame and blind, and dumb and maimed, and many other ailing folks, and cast them down at His feet, and He healed them.* These works were done among a people to whom they were mostly new, who were comparatively unacquainted with Jesus, and on whom this appearance of His made a great impression. St. Matthew's general account closes with an expression which indicates that a great number of these onlookers were not Jews by nation, and perhaps not even by religion. It is said that "they glorified the God of Israel." It was a region hitherto unvisited by Jesus, and, perhaps, partly

* Matt. xv. 29-31.

heathen. Hence the special interest which attended His deeds there and the praises these evoked.

The special instance selected by St. Mark out of this group of healings is that of a deaf man who, if not absolutely dumb, was unable to utter articulate and intelligible sounds.* It is the remark of Dr. Kitto, on this passage, who was himself totally deaf from his thirteenth year, that the man had either become deaf before the organs of speech had acquired their full strength, or had been so long deaf as to have partially lost, by the disuse of talk, the full command of them. If, however, as is more likely, he had never heard, then the want of articulate speech is fully accounted for. The deafness is the fountain of the evil. When Jesus proceeds to the cure the ears first are opened, then the bond of the tongue is loosed. The order is that which Nature has established in the relations of the two sets of organs, of nerve centres and of corresponding mental habitudes. It is the receiving of articulate sounds by the ear, the action of these upon the brain and the mind, which, in the ordinary course, awakens and educates the corresponding functions of speech. The entire closure of the one set of organs must prevent the other ever coming into use. Even in such a case, were the ears to be unstopped, there must ensue a long and complex process before speech could be evoked at all; much more ere it would become clear and fluent.

Now note how on this occasion nature is surpassed. It is only when we consider this exquisite law of the

* The Revisers have not departed from the A. V. rendering of μογιλάλος, "had an impediment in his speech." Meyer, relying on its use in the Septuagint for "dumb," holds with the Vulgate and Luther that the man was a deaf-mute. The conclusion he thinks is confirmed by the use of ἀλάλους in v. 37, and not refuted by v. 35.

relation between sound and speech in the mechanism of the senses and the brain that we can appreciate the truly stupendous character of the work here so simply narrated. With a touch and with a sigh Jesus opened the barred sense. But that is followed by a still greater marvel. The entire process of establishing correspondence between the centres of hearing and the centres of speech was abridged into a moment, and at the word of the Healer, "Be opened," the deaf man not only heard, but the dumb spake plain.

This man's case was simply one of natural malady. There is no hint here of any demoniac influence, as in some similar instances. It was purely physical, and most likely congenital defect. But these things are for us an allegory; they are symbols of what defect and deformity sin has wrought in the human soul. How dumb we are toward God! How we restrain prayer before Him! How seldom our souls go out frankly to Him! How little our heart-speech is exercised in the spiritual sphere, compared with our readiness to hold converse with our fellow-men! And why? We remain dumb and speechless toward God because we have been dead and deaf to His voice, because we have no spiritual receptivity. Let but the avenues of the soul be opened. Let God's word enter. Let His call be heard and accepted by the soul, then will its utterance and expression be stirred. "Christ begins His cure with the ears, and so acts in accordance with nature, since from hearing speaking comes, and to hearken in Bible language is to obey."* "Hear, and your soul shall live." Thus our Lord honours natural law even when He surpasses it. For how rapid are His processes. No sooner is

* ἀκοή begets ὑπακοή. Luther.

the soul's ear opened to hear Jesus than its tongue is unloosed to answer Him, and cries, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do"?

The Cure and its Method. His usual method was suggested by those who brought the man to Jesus (ver. 32). *They beseech Him to put His hand upon him.* So He virtually did, but His methods are ever fresh and full of adaptations, and there were some new actions used by the Healer specially suited to the case. (1) "*He took him aside from the multitude*" (ver. 33 *a*). We are not expressly told for what reasons; but as this feature of the method re-appears in the immediately following instance (Mark viii. 23), we may gather that a desire to secure privacy and prevent popular excitement was one of them. Further, as the curative acts were both in this and the following instance more peculiar and elaborate than was His wont, the retirement may have been meant to obviate any profane imitation of these. But, doubtless, it had reference to the special needs of this patient, and was fitted to secure an entirely undisturbed *rapport* between Himself and the deaf man, such as was requisite to the efficacy of the other peculiar means employed on this occasion.* For we find that when He had taken him aside, (2) "*He put* (or thrust) *His fingers into his ears, and He spit, and touched his tongue*" (ver. 33, *b*), *i.e.*, He used certain means or signs in effecting the cure. It was His common practice to use no means at all, but with a word to heal. The need for these unusual and suggestive actions in this instance is tolerably plain. They were not so much means by which He conveyed the blessing, as signs by which He explained to the man's mind how the blessing came. In all cases where

* So Meyer, *in loc.*

it was competent He based His miracles of healing on the patient's faith. Now in ordinary cases faith "cometh by hearing," and this was just a case where by hearing it could not come. Jesus, therefore, spoke to the deaf man in his own language—the language of signs. He put "His finger into his ears," in the action of boring them through, as much as to say that He intended to open them. Then He touched the stammering tongue with His hand, which He had first applied to His own mouth, to imply that the loosening power belonged to Jesus, resided in Him bodily, and was conveyed to this poor sufferer by the touch of His lips and hands. Last of all, the look to heaven was meant to say to the man that Jesus' power was a Divine power, that it was no other than the power of God. He and His Father were one. By these signs He reached the man's mind, awakened or quickened his faith, and brought about that co-operation of human trust and confidence with His healing power which He sought in all possible cases. It was no part of His plan that such restorations of hearing or sight should be viewed as mere portents of supernatural power, rather that they should become means of attachment to Himself as the Christ, and channels of spiritual enlargement and impression. Nothing can be more helpful to Christian workers confronted by some 'hard case' than this thought, that Christ can unlock the door of every human spirit. Did He take this original way to reach the deaf man's faith, and shall He lack means to open a path to the heart of any sinner, however closed it may seem? Even in Nature's beneficence, God has not left Himself "without witness" unto any. Much more let us be sure His Gospel has an individual as well as a universal fitness,

and Christ can let Himself in to the most secluded soul.

The manner of the Healer is, also, on this occasion peculiar, as it is particularly recorded. "*Looking up to heaven He sighed* (or groaned), *and saith unto Him*" (ver. 34). The look, as already remarked, may have been partly a sign for the man's own attention, but doubtless is connected with the sigh which accompanied it. Both together give us a glimpse of what we know must have pervaded the experience of Jesus, though not often detailed in the record. We are told in general that He was a man of sorrows and of loneliness. This scene, as the Evangelist depicts it, sets before us the solitary Saviour in presence of the sins and sufferings of a lost and erring race. He looks upward. He recalls the God who dwells in Him. He leans visibly for a moment on His eternal oneness with His Father. In the freedom and power of His correspondence with God He looks to heaven. In His fellow-feeling as a human Saviour—our brother High-priest—He sighs when He thinks of earth. Thus is the groan an utterance proceeding from the God-man, an expression of His double-sided nature in presence of all the woes and maladies of our human world. Some think we may more exactly interpret this sigh over the dumb man, whose speech He was to loose, on the analogy of His reflections when He opened blind eyes. That made Him feel and lament the more men's spiritual blindness.* So this made Him sad at the hardness of men's spiritual hearing, at the incapacity of their tongues to speak God's praise. At all events we may say with Luther,† This sigh "was not drawn

* See *e.g.* John ix. 39-41.

† See quotation in Stier, *Words of the Lord Jesus*, iii. 394 (Clark, 1859).

from Him by the single tongue and ears of this poor man. It is a common sigh over all tongues and ears, yea, over all hearts, bodies, souls, and over all men from Adam to his last descendant. This Gospel thus paints Christ that He who was man took such an interest in thee and in me, and in all of us, as we ought to take in ourselves, when He was involved in the sins and sufferings in which we were involved." So far we may read the meaning of that sigh. Where we cannot fathom it, let us leave it in the sacred mystery which belongs to our Divine Saviour and human brother. As seen in these Gospels, the Incarnation is no make-believe. Here is no Deity in the mask of man riding triumphant over our ills on the chariot of His Godhead. Yet neither is there here a mere man "o'erburthened by His brethren's sin,"—able to sigh but not to succour.

> "The giddy waves so restless hurled
> The vexed pulse of this feverish world;
> He views and counts with steady sight,
> Used to behold the Infinite." *

From the same lips whence broke this sigh of sympathy and compassion there issues the next moment,

The Word of Power. "He saith unto him, *Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.*" Mark records the Aramaic word which Jesus used; an indication that He not unfrequently, if not always in His popular addresses, used the vernacular of Palestine. More than the others this Evangelist records these Aramaic words, either for the graphic effect so characteristic of his writing—or because his narrative was based on the recitals of

* Keble, *Christian Year:* Twelfth Sunday after Trinity. This exquisite hymn is the finest of poetic commentaries on this narrative

the Apostle Peter, whose vivid mind retained these expressions, and who loved to record his Lord's emphatic use of his native tongue. The best reason we can find for the recording of this particular Aramaic expression, is just that it is one word,—that, literally, with a word He did such wonders. A glance to heaven,—a sigh,—a word, and the miracle is done! What wonder that the hearers remembered the word, and put it on record. There is in this something so altogether unlike man and man's ways,—his much speech about what he counts great things. Here is something so Divine, so godlike. It reminds one not of the creature but of the Creator. It is the style of the Eternal. A divine word it is, in its simplicity and power like a Creation word; yet divine also, in another sense, as a Redemption word. Creation makes. Redemption remakes, or restores. It was expressly foretold of the great day of Restoration, "Then shall the ears of the deaf be unstopped, and the tongue of the dumb sing."* The day of our Lord's earthly ministry was hailed, with His own consent, by just such tokens, and in these were recognised the signs of still higher Redeeming might. Shut senses He opens in His miracles, shut hearts by His word and Spirit, shut graves at last by His trumpet voice. 'Be opened' is His watchword as a Redeemer. Wherever He comes, comes a loosening and liberating influence—ears are unstopped, then souls awakened, then lips unsealed, and the praises of the new creation everywhere pour forth.

The Result. (Vv. 36, 37.) "*And He charged them that they should tell no man: but the more He charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; and*

* Isa. xxxv. 5, 6. *cf.* Matt. xi. 4, 5; Luke vii. 22.

were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: He maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak."

The reasons of the charge of silence we have already hinted at. He was evidently desirous to be retired at this time, and it is the more noticeable that it was precisely in this region of Decapolis that He had on a former occasion given the opposite instruction to the saved demoniac—"Go home and tell thy friends"—and he went and published it through all that region. The altered circumstances, the peculiarities of individuals, were handled by our Lord in a freedom and breadth which His followers would do well to imitate. Why should we insist that every case of spiritual impression be immediately trumpeted to all the world, when the word of the Lord Jesus to that soul may be, "See thou tell no man"? Why, on the other hand, should men insist that in all cases conversion is a thing too mysterious and sacred to be spoken of, when the Lord's instruction to another may be, "Go and shew thy friends how great things the Lord hath done for thee"? This may upon occasion be the very method needful to perpetuate and advance the life of grace in that soul. In this instance the charge was given not so much to the man himself as to all present. The prohibition, however, only heightened their zeal. The desire on Jesus' part to suppress any popular excitement based on mere wonder was counteracted by an enthusiasm on their part, honest enough in its way. It was vain to enjoin silence. Wider and wider spread the unbidden fame, till from the lips of these less prejudiced, though less instructed, crowds, who had beheld a succession of miracles, there swelled a hymn of praise, such as is not recorded elsewhere,

and which has remained a fit expression of the Healer's glory. The word has a sublime simplicity. If His "Be opened" reminds us of Creation's *fiat*, their "He hath done all things well" recalls the Creator's praise. The parallel is appropriate. The new creation is fairer than the old. It is more glorious to re-make what sin has marred, than to call out of nothing. Rejoicing angels and ransomed souls will usher in, with such praises, the day of universal Restitution and Regeneration, "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saints."

XIV.

THE BLIND MAN AT BETHSAIDA.

MARK viii. 22-6.

THIS miracle, like the preceding, is narrated by St. Mark alone, and plainly belongs to the same group. Nothing in the narrative intervenes but the Feeding of the Four Thousand and the conversation which followed in crossing and re-crossing the lake. Jesus was at this time avoiding familiar ground. He passes on, in the next recorded tour, to Cesarea Philippi. This makes it all but certain that the Bethsaida of our story is not the city of Andrew and Philip, but the "village," as it is called by the Evangelist, on the north-eastern shore which Herod had recently raised to the dignity of a town, and distinguished by the name of *Julias*, in honour of the daughter of the Emperor Augustus. In details this cure closely resembles that of the deaf man in Decapolis. The withdrawal of the patient into seclusion before the cure is wrought, the unusual elaborateness of the Healer's action in working it, and the steps taken to avoid publicity afterwards, are common to both. These features have been by some attributed partly to a materialising conception of miracle in the mind of the Evangelist, and partly to his desire to surround it with an air of mystery. The

conclusive answer is that St. Mark records other healings of our Lord as wrought with all the simplicity, openness, and promptitude ascribed to them in the other Gospels. If, therefore, a common character of reticence and complexity belongs to these cures, as is undoubtedly the case, this must be explained by something in the circumstances either of Jesus or of the men themselves, probably of both. These healings belong to a group of occasional works done in a district removed from His usual work-place, where therefore a certain elaborateness of process towards the cure may have been needful to catch the attention and rouse the faith of the patients. The precautions taken both before and after the cure to keep it quiet show that the Lord meant to repress the mere external notoriety which in these new regions was apt to follow upon His miracles. Indeed, there appears, at this time, something like a desire to close, or, at least, restrict the healing ministry altogether. That this should come out in miracle-narratives peculiar to the second Gospel is precisely what we should expect. For the record of our Lord's "successive retirements from the presence of conflicting tides of feeling forms a feature of this Gospel." *

When Jesus and His disciples had arrived at Bethsaida, "*They bring to Him a blind man and beseech Him to touch him*" (ver. 22). The preferable reading, which suggests a company on their travels, not Jesus alone ("and *they* come," etc., R.V.), also the prevalence of the present tense through the story, belong to those minute graphic touches in this Gospel which are invaluable. "*And He took hold of the blind man by the hand and*

* Dr. Marcus Dods, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1889), p. 31.

brought (*lit.* conveyed) *him out of the village.*" Here recent criticism prefers the reading, which gives a slightly greater prominence to Jesus' action, than even the words of the received text that "He *led* him out of the town." * The man did not belong to Bethsaida, but to some neighbouring hamlet. This made it both possible and desirable he should be conveyed some little distance out of the place, that no adventitious excitement might be caused there by what was to follow. Hence also the charge given to avoid the village and its inhabitants on his way home.

Ver. 23. "*When He had spit on his eyes and laid His hands upon him, He asked him if he saw ought.*" Here, again, there is a close resemblance in detail to the cure of the deaf man in our last story. As in that case, so in this, Jesus held it necessary to do more than had been prayed for. That He should touch him was all that was specified by those who brought the man. Possibly because in both cases the men were brought by their friends, and therefore their own desire and expectation were little stirred, the Lord found it needful by these various actions to quicken faith and hope. The use of the saliva is common to both these cases, and to that of the man in John ix. This was a well-known Jewish remedy for affections of the eyes. † Indeed, there are traditions of its use for various disorders in all popular treatment of the simpler and homelier sort. These actions on Jesus' part show that He conveyed His Divine healing to His afflicted brethren through that blessed humanity by which He was of kin to them. It suggests that He took flesh and blood for this among many other reasons, that the

* ἐξήνεγκεν instead of εξήγαγεν.

† See some illustrations in Edersheim *in loc.*

Godhead dwelling in Him bodily might through that very body impart its gifts and effects to men.

Immediately on this first action Jesus put the question, "*Seest thou aught?*" * He desires to draw the man's attention to the process of restoration, to lead him into an intelligent appreciation of the cure as wrought by His Divine power, yet through the tender human hand. Ver. 24: "*And he looked up.*" The first visual movement is naturally towards the source of light. In looking up he looks around as well, and says, "*I see men; for I behold them as trees walking.*" † The friends and disciples standing round him most likely now begin to stir, and as they move he sees them indistinctly, in blurred and magnified outline. He knows they are men by their motion, though in size they seem trees. His ability thus to describe the effect of partial vision sufficiently shows that the man had not been born blind.

Ver. 25. "*Then again He laid His hands upon his eyes; and he looked steadfastly, and was restored, and saw all things clearly.*"‡ At the second application the cure was complete. The men seemed no longer large and dim like trees; the trees no longer seemed to waver. The objects of life and nature took their proper shapes and proportions; the fair landscape lay firm and clear in the sunshine. For what if, after all, one reason why the Healer, to begin with, led him out of the village were simply that his eyes might first open on nature's face, on those country sights that had been familiar

* So in the more lively reading followed by the Revisers.

† This abrupt phrase, rather than the easier reading of the received text, is now all but universally accepted.

‡ R.V., with the best authority, reads thus, instead of "made him look up," and "all things" instead of "every man."

once ? * And from this quiet spot the Lord dismissed him, with vision perfectly restored, to his rural home. The one thing in which this miracle stands quite alone is that it was not an entire cure in an instant, but was divided into two distinct stages. This might possibly be explained as the restoration of the visual organs first, and then of the power to use them. The sight may have been organically complete at the first touch, while the power of accurately perceiving the size and relations of objects was only imparted by the second application of the healing hand. The explanation, however, would apply only to the cure of one born blind. In the case expressly so described (John ix.), though there were preliminaries, sight itself was instantaneous and complete. In the present case, therefore, we must suppose either that the man himself had need of the mental spur which a cure by stages might supply, or that this unusual method had some such didactic and suggestive purposes as have usually been found in it.

This brief, terse story is full of spiritual beauties. The picture of gentleness and condescension presented at the outset is perfect. Think of the Lord of Glory taking the hand of this poor man in His own, not giving it to any of the man's friends or of the disciples, but Himself guiding the sightless patient to the place of healing. One has but to conjure up the scene to have its moral power blaze into one's conscience. What a lesson it reads us of the true levelling force of Christ's religion; of the directness of the Christian service. How much we spoil our imitation of Jesus by putting proxy-work in room of personal effort. The isolating, too, of the blind man before his cure is characteristic of Jesus, and suggestive of some of His spiritual processes.

* So Bengel suggests.

Especially does it fit into the analogy suggested by this and the immediately preceding miracle. The unsealing of the senses of these secluded men was best done in quiet, where their minds also could be reached. That opening of the inward sense which is to be followed by a spiritual revolution requires aloofness in its primary stages. So was Saul of Tarsus withdrawn for three days into the isolation of physical blindness; and later on for perhaps as many years into the seclusion of the Arabian desert, that he might be fitted with far-reaching spiritual vision to be the apostle of the universal dispensation. So, also, had the "solitary monk who shook the world" to be first the lonely wrestler in his cell at Erfurt, gaining through years of spiritual struggle that insight into the grace of salvation by faith and the freedom of the Christian man by which he set Europe free from mediæval bondage.

But the thing in this story which offers itself most readily as a spiritual emblem is the progressiveness of the cure. Blindness can be so dealt with. A demon must be cast out wholly or not at all. Leprosy must be at once and entirely removed, for the man is a leper still if but one spot remains. But sight may be gradually restored and yet the recovery may be genuine and complete. As we have seen already, Jesus' cures of blindness are types of the gracious opening of spiritual eyesight. This usually takes place by degrees. Indeed, one may say that gradual enlargement is the law of inward vision. While, therefore, Jesus often gave sight instantaneously to poor blind folk, it was fitting that He should make this exceptional case more exactly illustrative of the usual course of spiritual enlightenment. Let us note then—

That the first stage of this cure was *real sight.* As soon as Jesus had laid his hands on the man's eyes and put His question, the man, looking up and around, could say, "I see." The first step in spiritual illumination is to give the power of sight,—the Seeing Eye. There is no time when the man can be said neither to have sight nor to be blind. If he can see at all he is blind no more. There must be an absolute beginning. What is taught here is not gradual regeneration. It is the picture of a regenerate man being gradually enlightened.

At this first stage, however, sight may be *very imperfect.* Among those who receive the grace of God this is not uncommon. They see, but their sight is not clear, nor strong. They cannot distinguish things that differ. They confound many parts of Divine truth. This produces mistakes and errors both of belief and conduct. They entertain exaggerated and disproportionate views of some truths, and have no view of other truths at all. This, again, occasions division and distraction, and renders these partially enlightened ones an easy prey to deceivers. How often we see those who are newly brought under spiritual impressions imposed upon by teaching that is partial and one-sided. Drawn away from the scriptural ordinance of instruction, till the first fervour of their unripe zeal cools down, by-and-bye they tire of their self-chosen teachers, and having nothing to fall back on lapse into carelessness and spiritual sloth. These more serious consequences will, however, be averted where there is a humble consciousness of imperfect spiritual knowledge. Had this man cried out at the unripe stage, "Now I see perfectly," his cure might have been arrested. But he knew so much as to know that his vision was

incomplete, and hence his straightforward answer. Not even to our Healer must we profess more inward clearness than we have. Indeed, however reticent of our doubts with men, we cannot too completely and confidentially lay them before the Lord.

Another characteristic of the imperfect stage of spiritual vision is that it is accompanied with feelings of uneasiness, and even of alarm. To leave, for a moment, the analogue of a blind man partially restored to sight, notice what happens to ordinary eyesight when the conditions are suddenly altered. When we come out at night into a dark and moonless sky, even though clear and without clouds, we are conscious at first of nothing but an intense opaque gloom. The indoor lights are fresh in our eyes, and we can see nothing clearly. But presently the influence of the blue dome above is felt; the eye gets accustomed to its new conditions; the tempered light of the stars has power; the darkness begins to dispart before us, and the way lies plain. Many, for the first time, feel pain and perplexity about religion when they come under spiritual impressions. Up to that point they supposed they knew all about religious truths, and firmly believed them. Now, when they have real need for their knowledge and summon up their faith, they find only clouds and darkness. So long as the artificial lights and trumpery limits of this world filled and bounded their vision, they fancied that they saw. But when they come out, led by a Divine Hand, to look at the real and eternal they feel for the first time bewildered and sightless; and it may take much purging and training at their Redeemer's charge ere full spiritual eyesight comes. "Open Thou mine eyes," is a needful prayer for us all. It is most appropriate on the lips

of those to whom the kingdom of heaven is but newly discovered, or who have been brought to a standstill in their further apprehension of it. But let us understand the prayer we offer. Ask the Great Healer to open your eyes! In that case you may be asking a sharp surgical operation or a long, slow process of couching for the inward eye,—a process in which seclusion, patience, and continuous application of the means of cure may be the ruling elements. At all events, the answer will be something very different from the easy course of which we are apt to dream. As if by some magical transformation, without process and without trouble, we could become enlightened and holy.

Betimes Christ gives to all His own *complete sight.* In His light they shall see light clearly. The remedy for all imperfect spiritual vision is renewed contact and closer acquaintance with Jesus. Its secret is to live nearer Him—let His light-giving Word dwell in us more richly,—in short, to have Him lay His hands on us anew. He has made express provision for the progressive enlightenment of His believing followers. The great historical instance of this is patent. Though with His own hand He had opened the eyes of His disciples, while He companied with them in the flesh, yet when He left them they still "saw men but as trees walking." They were surprised at His betrayal, utterly abashed at His death. Upon His resurrection they believed, "but some of them doubted"; and up to His parting hour what the most looked for was a mundane revolution, and the transference of empire from the Roman to the Jew. All that Jesus said was, "When I am gone you shall have another Teacher." This gives us the rule or law for progressive enlightenment. These two points in the spiritual process are

fixed. No one can be a follower of Jesus, or heir of the kingdom at all, without the first incisive touch of the new birth. He cannot "see" it but by the Holy Ghost. But as distinctly there is another and further office of the Spirit—to enlarge with His unction those who already have the faculty of sight. "After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus," says Paul, "I cease not to pray that, having the eyes of your heart enlightened, ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe."* Yes! in His good time Christ completes the work He has begun. "The eyes of them that see shall not be dim." He begins by bringing us out of darkness. He carries us on into "marvellous light."

* Eph. i. 18-19 (R.V.).

XV.

THE EPILEPTIC BOY.

MATT. xvii. 14-21; MARK ix. 14-29; LUKE ix. 37-43.

IN a well-known masterpiece of Raphael, the canvas is divided into two parts by a line across the middle. In the upper field of the painting is the Transfiguration; in the lower half—a vivid group—this parent presenting his afflicted son to the disciples. The painter found his theme and its justification in the Evangelists. For not without design, surely, were there placed—as in all the three accounts—two such contrasted scenes on one page. Above, heaven opened, in the calm of the Transfigured Christ. Below, hell on earth, in one of the saddest instances of human misery. But stay! Christ was the centre of the scene above; in that below, He was absent for the moment. Meanwhile there stands the voluble father with his poor boy; before him the nine disciples, faltering and abashed at their failure; close round them their malicious critics, no longer repressing a triumphant sneer; wider off a ring of curious spectators, wondering whether Jesus and His cause have now begun to decline. When He arrives all is changed; He comprehends the case at a glance. His mere presence turns the tide. The whole attention of the people fastens on Him. "*Straightway,*

all the multitude, when they saw Him, were greatly amazed, and running to Him saluted Him." They are surprised, no doubt, first of all at this marvellously timed return; perhaps, also, when they come closer to Him, at some exalted look, more than His usual majesty, that lingers on His face from the glory of the "Holy Mount." If so, it is a glory which attracts while it astonishes; and, at all events, they gather round Him with all the glad enthusiasm of former days. For it is tolerably evident that in this story we are transferred once more to the familiar ground of Inner Galilee. Only in a locality where His usual foes were present as well as the crowds who knew Him could such incidents take place. Immediately Jesus gets at the heart of matters. "*He asked the scribes, What question ye with them?*" 'Question Me now if you have aught to say.' But they fell back silenced. Argument and debate are soon at an end in Jesus' presence; it is need that now begins to speak. When those who came merely to argue about Christ were dumb, the man who needed Him struggled forward eager and ready. Throwing himself on his knees at Jesus' feet, "*Master,*" he "answered," —though he had not been previously addressed at all,— "*I have brought unto Thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit.*" Then he rushes on with his description of the ailment, a case of epileptic lunacy, complicated by "possession." * "*Wheresoever it taketh him, it dasheth him down, and he foameth, and grindeth his teeth, and pineth away.*" Having begun his story with what

* The accounts taken together supply all the usual symptoms of epilepsy—the convulsive cries, the tearing, foaming, and bruising. St. Matthew's word gives the character of periodic lunacy; St. Mark supplies the most graphic details. All three consent on the demoniac element.

expressed a measure of faith—namely, that it was to Jesus Himself he had meant to bring his son—he breaks off with an expression of disappointment: "*I spake to Thy disciples that they should cast him out, and they could not.*"

Hereupon the Lord looked round with rebuke upon them all,—the disciples, no doubt, included,—but especially the scribes with the rest, and the suppliant as well. "*O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you?*" An expression of the poignant sorrow of all His life, at the slowness of heart of His own, at the obdurate unbelief of His contemporaries. An expression, too, of Divine home-sickness, though not of impatience with earth; for He must abide till the mustard seed of His Kingdom is planted in human hearts. He cannot leave the world till that is accomplished. How long shall it be? Then, turning more particularly to the father of the sufferer, He said, "*Bring him unto Me.*" When brought near, the lad was taken with one of his paroxysms. The evil spirit flung him, as it were, in defiance at the Healer's feet, writhing and foaming. With characteristic calmness Jesus turns from the sad spectacle, and enters into conversation with the father—proceeds, that is to say, to His purposed end deliberately, and in His own way. For, in accordance with His wonted spiritual method, He must get at the faith of the man, that his child might be blessed. Indeed this, in St. Mark's detailed account, which we mainly follow, is the heart of the story. Like some others, it brings out eminently the creative moral force of Jesus. In His presence, and in converse with Him, the human soul brings forth spiritual utterances such as, unvisited by Him, it had never breathed. As the sun draws out of earth's lowliest places forms of

beauty that reflect his own radiance, so in these Gospel colloquies we are ever and anon arrested not only by Christ's own thoughts and words of power, but by sayings He elicits from others. He is the Lord and Lover of humanity; and for His cause out of the mouths of its very babes and sucklings strength is ordained.

Note, then, how Jesus led this man to the striking utterance with which we associate his story. First He inquires, like a gentle physician, how long this terrible thing has had possession of the youth. The father replies, "Of *a child*"—*i.e.*, from infant years, or rather early boyhood. But no sooner does the man get his mouth opened than off he goes again in a description of the malady, telling how oft and how suddenly the victim was seized, so as to be almost destroyed by falling into the fire or into the water. Then he brings himself to a pause by a pathetic but almost desponding appeal: "*If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*" Jesus takes up the word, "*If Thou canst.*" * 'Nay,' He said, 'the difficulty is not there. It is not My power that is in doubt any more than My willingness. I am both able and willing. The real question is, If thou canst believe.' Wisely and tenderly Jesus takes this man's struggling belief in hand and brings it to birth. 'Think not that to get much you must give much; that for this great cure you must have a great faith. Only trust Me, only have confidence in My power and grace.' "*All things are possible to him that believeth.*" Pressed by his eager love for his child, anxious to prove his reliance upon Jesus, the man

* Many moderns prefer to read "Τὸ Εἰ δύνῃ" instead of the received "Τὸ εἰ δύνασαι πιστεῦσαι." The reading is abrupt and difficult, but the sense would be substantially the same: "As to this, If thou canst," etc.

catches a glimpse of new and higher grace. This gracious One who invites his trust can dispel his distrust, and with voice and tears together he cries out, "LORD, I BELIEVE; HELP THOU MINE UNBELIEF." All this has taken place in a few minutes—in less time, perhaps, than it has taken to read it; not in presence of the great crowd, but among those who ran forward to meet Jesus on His first appearance, foremost of whom was the father with his child. The multitude, who are still at some distance, perceive a halt. Jesus is talking to the man. The sufferer is lying wallowing on the ground. Something is going to be done. Then the people begin to run towards the group of which Jesus is the centre. So soon as He saw them gathering He delayed no more. Faith has been expressed by the father, and all is now ready; Jesus turns to the piteous object at His feet, and addresses the demon in terms of majesty and power: "*Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.*" "*And having cried, and rent him sore, he came out of him.*" The parting shriek of rage was the first sign that the lad, hitherto dumb, would now speak. The malicious injuring of the tenement showed that the evil-minded tenant had received irresistible notice to quit. Then throwing, what seemed the dead body, at the Saviour's feet, "*he went out.*" The Healer who could have raised him from the dead took up the seeming corpse, and he arose; and, as Luke records, He delivered him again to his father.

Let us fix our attention on the central expression in this narrative, as it illustrates believing grace.

1. FAITH, LIKE LIGHT, REVEALS ITS OWN SOURCE. Here is a real human response to the Divine call, the receptive hand stretched out for the blessing. "I *believe.*"

But in the very act it becomes plain that the power so to reach out to Christ is regarded as a heavenly grace —the gift of that Lord in whom the man believes. Again, as in that previous instance of the Syro-phœnician, the Lord lets the decisive word be taken out of His own lips. When the man had said, "If Thou canst do anything," and Jesus has replied, "If thou canst believe," all seems for a moment at an end. The responsibility is rolled back on the helpless man. The Saviour's help seems all shut up under this one condition. Anything can be done, everything can be got by faith, and by this alone. Is this to say poor trustless men can get no good of God's grace? The treasure-house is locked, and man has lost the only key to it. 'Nay,' says this immortal answer, 'it is precisely the Christ of God and Helper of man who can put this key into his hand.' 'If I can believe. Yea, Lord, so I do; but since it is by believing all is obtained, Thou art the Source and Giver of belief too. Help Thou mine unbelief.' So they stand out in this utterance, those two sides, the really twin aspects of the answer to what seems oft an insoluble puzzle. Believing is at once man's act and God's grace. So much man's act that the Lord cannot help without it. So much God's grace that the man who believes disclaims all the merit of it. So much man's act that the Almighty Giver waits for it. So much God's grace that the receiver prays for it, as well as for all it receives; and in the act of taking God's gifts ascribes to Him alone the power to take them. The moment it dawns on this poor father's mind that Jesus wants to be trusted for his child's deliverance, he sees an end of his perplexities. Jesus is sufficient both for the cure and for the faith that gets the cure. Thus the faith

that is in him reveals its origin. Just as a hill torrent, after bursting from its buried spring and cleaving its way through worn and riven rock, when it gets strength enough to form a tiny pool, and for the first time gathers its waters and smoothes out its wrinkles, reflects the skies and the clouds whence it came.

This whole story is a vivid comment on the words, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Through faith! Is faith the condition? Nay, but this itself is the grace and the gift of God. On my act of simple trust in Christ depends all my salvation. But when I am made to feel, as this burdened soul was, that I have no choice —that there is no possible weighing of courses—that I cannot but flee to Jesus and cast my burden on Him, I recognise a power above my own,—a sweetly constraining power that shuts me up to this. I trust Him for the salvation, and in the very act I turn my gaze on Him who gave it all; the act was mine, but the grace was His. For if it is all through my faith, all my faith is still His gift.

2. FAITH DETECTS UNBELIEF, AND FINDS A REFUGE FROM IT. Nothing is more moving in the whole story than the way in which the man is drawn on to see where the knot of the case lay. At first he evidently supposes that all turns on the intense form of the malady, of which, on every occasion, he indulges in graphic description. Then, he thinks, it was not removed because of the absence of Jesus, and the lesser might of the disciples. Again, misconstruing the quiet and tender manner of Jesus Himself, he entertains a fear lest even He should fail to grapple with it. At length, at the Lord's stirring word, the spark of intelligent faith is struck, and it flashes light upon the darkness of his

own heart. The scales fall from his eyes. He perceives where the hindrance had lain all the while. Nothing stood in the way but his own doubting, and he now cries out for help to remove it.

It is a miserable and guilty thing that we trust our Saviour with so feeble a trust, that we have questioned Him so often, that we have still to complain of so much coldness and deadness of heart. Yet the man who complains of his own deadness is at least alive. In this keen sense of imperfection, in this directness of self-accusation, you have some notes of a believing soul. It is the man into whose blindness one ray of light has penetrated, who feels how great is the darkness that remains, and how precious would be the unclouded day. Such an one is he who, in eagerly expressing his faith, confesses and bemoans his want of faith, and repairs anew to the Author and Finisher of faith Himself.

For faith as it discloses unbelief discovers also the only cure for it. What is this but fresh recourse to Him from whom the grace came? To say, "I believe," is to put trust in Jesus for the thing desired. To say to Him, "Help mine unbelief," is to put more trust in Him. It is to exercise the same grace in a new direction, which further reveals its nature. For faith in its heart and essence is a venture; not a peradventure, nor a perchance, but an enterprise. Its first action launches the soul into a new element, and in that element must it thenceforth move. "As the soul thus ventures out, as it quits the apparent and familiar security of sense or sight (to which faith is the true antithesis), new needs, new truths, new fears and longings are borne in upon it; it discerns new capacities and new deficiencies; it begins to suspect both

within and beyond itself wonders and perils that before were hidden from it."* Now this venture of faith is rewarded by the discovery not only of new needs and faults unknown to the unspiritual mind, but of new resources in Him for whose sake and in whose strength the venture has been made. When the soul, thrown into this strange element, becomes conscious and timid at the step already taken, there remains no way to cover its confusion but to take another. Having gone so far as to trust Christ for one thing beyond sense and sight, we are bound to go on and trust Him for some other, and soon for everything. Faith is bold to beg and borrow of its Lord. Its own nothingness and poverty make it even bolder. It fills all the vessels it has out of His never-failing stores, and then goes back to Him for more and larger vessels to fill with more abundance.

The side-lights of the story are full of instruction—*e.g.*, (1) *the vicarious power of faith.* The success of this poor father for his child is typical of a whole class of our Lord's acts of mercy. One-half of the detailed healings in the Gospel history were wrought at the prayer of friends. A considerable proportion were cures of those who could in nowise appeal to Jesus on their own behalf, and who therefore, so far as receptive faith was concerned, were represented by their intercessors. Among the countless undetailed healings the proportion of such cures must have been great. Indeed, this was evidently a principle of the Lord's healing ministry. What a Gospel, this, of which the Author plainly says by His deeds, 'Not only come, but bring!' 'Come for yourselves and find rest. Bring also the halt, the blind, the weak, the little ones, that

* *The Hallowing of Work*, F. Paget, D.D. (Rivingtons, 1889), p. 27.

they too may get the blessing, and My house may be filled.' How far-reaching this principle is, will appear when we consider the gracious teachings of Christianity as to infant salvation, its still wider teaching as to the place of representative faith for those who can own and confess nothing for themselves; also, the marvellous spiritual results of patient, persevering, intercessory prayer. Nor should the reflex action of the principle be forgot. This father stands beside the Christ of history, a monument of faith, timid yet true, because his love for his boy set him there. His "Have compassion on *us* and help *us*," like the heathen mother's "Have mercy on *me*," was highly honoured by Jesus. The parental love that identified itself with the suffering child was used by Him as a step to the faith which united child and parent both to the Healer. Thus will true spiritual affection for those committed to our care draw ourselves and them into closest bonds with Christ.

(2) *The situation of the unsuccessful nine.* Their failure had been conspicuous, and rankled in their minds. So after the cure was wrought and all joyfully ended, they came to Jesus privately in the house, and inquired the cause. He, without a word of reproach or a single aggravating hint, laid His hand firmly on the exact truth. It was unbelief, want of faith, or rather of the watchfulness in prayer which keeps faith ready for action. "*This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*" Does not the situation recur? Are there not social evils preying on the body politic, "open sores," even of the modern world, with which Christianity —at least the Christianity of the Churches—seems unable to cope? Are there not times when their failure threatens to shame the cause of Christ, if not

Christ Himself? But the Church is not Christ. His working is not to be measured by that of any human representatives, official or unofficial. We must not repeat the mistake of the multitude that day, and because the disciples have failed think that Jesus will fail. Note, however, His reply as to their failure. It is to the effect that there are evils not to be met successfully without exceptional devotion and self-sacrifice in His followers. There are kinds of demonism—how many of them are still with us!—in face of which ordinary easy-going Christianity breaks down. To cast them out heroism is needed; and surely Christ and His cause have never wanted for heroes and heroic devotion when the need came. It is noticeable that Jesus emphasizes the reality rather than the quantity of faith. He says, if it be only present and ready to wrestle with God, though it were as a grain of mustard seed, it can remove mountains. This brings us back to the central lesson of the story—*the self-forgetfulness of real faith.* There is no more subtle form of self-righteousness than the way many Christians have of torturing inquiry after faith itself as an inward act, a condition or prerequisite of salvation, sifting and separating, analyzing and defining various forms of that particular experience. Let us not parley about faith, but flee to Him who is rich in mercy and ready to relieve—to Him and His boundless grace, which can cover us and our sins and our fears and our trust too, despite its mixture of distrust,—"Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

XVI.

THE MAN BORN BLIND.

JOHN ix.

A WELL-KNOWN modern sceptic has stated the conditions under which, were a miracle produced, he would hold himself bound to believe it. They are to this effect: that there should be a committee of competent judges, in whose presence it should be wrought; that they should have every opportunity of testing the reality of all that was done; and that the wonder should be repeated before them at their request, till they were satisfied of its actuality. The conditions are of course impossible. For the result would not be a miracle at all, but simply a new concurrence of events scientifically found to hold good upon due occasion. But if sifting the evidence for a miracle, stating every possible objection to it, discussing publicly, not centuries afterwards, but at the time and on the spot, the whole details, turning the occurrence out and in, back and forth, exhausting every effort to shake its validity, and then finding that it has been a veritable work above the ordinary processes of nature and beyond the powers of men—if such cross-examination should seem to any one essential to his believing in the

historicity of the miracles,—in this instance it actually took place, and we have the circumstantial record of it in this chapter.

This treatment is entirely exceptional in the miracle-narratives; but on that account this single specimen has all the greater apologetic value. It can no more be said that the difficulties of the modern mind are wholly disregarded in the Gospels. Here is precisely that argumentative handling of the various difficulties about a miracle with which we are so familiar. The occurrence is related. Then arise the questions upon it: Was there really anything unusual done? How was it done? Who was the doer of it? Was the doing of it a mark of Divine commission and authority? Who and what shall we conclude the worker of it to be? These and such as these are the questions which every age—our own pre-eminently—has asked about the miracles of Jesus. They are asked and answered, in this instance, in presence of the facts themselves. Let us read the narrative in this light. There are four parts to the story.

1. The Introduction of the Case (vv. 1-5). The whole incident hangs upon that grand word of Jesus, "I am the Light of the world" (viii. 12). This text for the entire section contained in these two chapters here again recurs (ver. 5). Of this great utterance, the restoration to sight of a man born blind was the contemporaneous and actual illustration. The analogy so suggested runs deeper than at first sight appears. The light of Divine salvation concentrated in the face of Jesus Christ overcomes the darkness of man's evil, moral and physical. Such is the thesis to be illustrated. Significantly enough, the story is introduced by a discussion of the evil—the connection of its moral and

physical aspects. "*As He passed by, He saw a man. . . . Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*" Physical evil the result of sin was the problem present to the mind of the disciples as they looked at this poor man. But they took it by the wrong handle. Whose sin was it that caused this evil? The Lord's answer does not disturb the principle which connects sin and suffering. No one asserted this more strongly than He. Only He exposes the false notion of its retributive distribution. Suffering, it is true, follows sin; but here and now the distribution of suffering is not according to the persons or proportions of the sinning. Saints suffer; sinners suffer. Saints often suffer in this life more than sinners, but neither suffer in proportion to their sin. That question runs into another world than this. 'Let us take a higher point of view,' says Jesus. 'Our work in this suffering world is not to speculate about the origin of the evil, not to scrutinize its distribution, not to judge our suffering neighbours, but to help and heal them.' Evil is here. In face of this, the only Christ-like question is how to remedy it. Jesus saw in this blind man a prepared trophy of His grace. Christians need go no further in the line of causal inquiry. This man is here, poor and blind, that "the work of God should be manifest in him." Man's darkness suggested to Jesus the light He could pour into it; man's misery, His power to relieve it; man's present need, meant for Jesus the call to immediate beneficent action. "*I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day.*"

2. The Miracle Itself (vv. 6, 7). As Jesus passed by, His compassionate gaze had fastened upon the man born blind. So soon as the preliminary questions of the disciples were disposed of, He proceeds

spontaneously to work the cure. There was no request on the man's own part. In his total darkness and unacquaintance with the facts there could scarce be. There was none on the part of others in his behalf. The course of procedure in this case was in some respects unusual. It consisted of two stages. First, He made a plaster of moistened clay, with which He covered the blind man's eyes. Then He bade him go and wash in Siloam. The man obeyed. To say that he returned with his eyesight perfectly restored would not accurately express the result, for this man had never eyesight before. The blessing which burst on this poor child of darkness for the first time is expressed in one phrase of simple majesty worthy of the creative might revealed in it. "*He washed, and came seeing.*"

That the Lord should have employed the medium of the moistened clay, that the cure should have taken place after a certain process of application, was peculiar to this case. Signs to help the faith of the patient, a process or progress to the beneficent result, were not altogether unusual in these healings.* The speciality in our present case is the paradoxical character of the means employed. But for the idea of a certain virtue in the saliva, and the known use of it in pious ceremonies, one would regard the plastering of the eyes with moistened clay as grotesquely unfit to procure sight. The other part of the process—sending the man to wash in a sacred fountain—has also its popular parallels, but was specially meant, no doubt, here to test the obedient trust of the patient, and therefore was an intelligible step to the spiritual result which the Healer had in His ultimate view. The whole work illustrates not merely in general the success of Christ

* Cf. Mark vii. 33, and viii. 23.

—the Light of the world—in dispelling the darkness of human ills, but more specially the analogy between the cure of physical blindness and the enlightening of the mind in the knowledge of Christ. The narrative which follows displays to us the transition by well-marked steps of a human soul from the total darkness of an innocent ignorance to a firm and rock-like assurance of Jesus as the Son of God.

Upon this clear teaching of the miracle many ingenious religious analogies have been imposed. The Fathers saw in this cure of blindness by washing a doctrine of the baptismal font. Into a passing interpretation of the name Siloam preachers have commonly read an image of Messiah—the sent One—as the fountain opened for the removal of all spiritual impurity and blindness. More ingeniously still, some find in the first process, of the clay, a reference to the helpless religious methods of the Pharisees—the function of blind guides to aggravate the spiritual blindness that men naturally labour under; in the second, the function of Jesus to wash away the artificial obstructions and restore lost power to the organ.* However tempting some of these analogies may be, it does seem unlikely that there was meant a symbol within a symbol. The great, broad truth, "I am come, a Light into the world," was sufficiently illustrated by the giving of sight to one born blind, with all its rich suggestiveness of moral and spiritual illumination. We do not need to complicate the noble outline of the teaching by allegorizing with curious detail the spittle, the clay, and the washing. This is surely false exegesis, as colour upon colour is false blazonry.

3. The Discussion. This, which turns on the

* So Bruce, p. 204.

actuality of the miracle and the character of the Worker, falls into several stages or acts (vv. 8-34). First of all, there is the friendly discussion among neighbours and acquaintances (vv. 8-12). With much dramatic vividness and simplicity the narrative gives the immediate impression made upon those to whom the man had long been a familiar object at his usual place of alms-getting. Their surprise took at first the natural form of doubting his identity. When that doubt was dispelled upon his own testimony, and the man had told by whom and how his sight was given him, the next recourse would have been to the Healer; but He could not be found. Then followed the appeal to the judgment of the Sanhedrim, or, at least, to the Pharisees as their religious leaders—a step which shows how entirely the people were subject to this authority. Here the evangelist bids us note that it was a Sabbath on which all this had been done. This prepares us for the inevitable bias with which the work and the Worker will be regarded. When the man had repeated to the Pharisees the story of his cure precisely as he had told it to his friends and neighbours, the dilemma appeared. 'Either we must deny the fact of the cure, or we must admit that Jesus did no wrong in making the clay and commanding a lustration on the Sabbath.' 'Now,' said the most, 'we cannot afford this last. We must be right about the Sabbath, and He must be wrong. There can, therefore, have been no work of healing wrought by such a transgressor of the law.' Some took the other alternative. 'The facts are too firm and strong for denial. There must be some allowance for the Healer's action on the Sabbath: for how can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?' Thus the dilemma split them up into two

parties (ver. 16). It would seem to have been the major part who wanted to deny the cure, for the action proceeds henceforward entirely on their lines. They attempted first to elicit some unfavourable opinion from the man himself. "*What sayest thou of Him*," etc. But the happy subject of the healing was immovable. The man who had opened his eyes must be a good man, a God-sent man—in one word, "a prophet." Then they try another tack. 'Let us assail the facts in detail. Perhaps this is not the man; or, if so, perhaps he was not born blind. Let us call his parents.' These, when called, proved to be wary, not to say wily, witnesses, out of whom very little could be got. Yet all that is obtained makes for Jesus and against the Pharisees. They will not deny that the man is their son, and so his identity is confirmed. They will not deny that he was born blind. So the ground of the miracle is established on the best possible evidence. They not only admit, but affirm, that he is now a seeing man; only they will say nothing as to "how" the sight came or who wrought the marvel. On these points they refer to their son himself, as of mature age. For themselves, says the narrator, they feared the excommunication which had been determined on for all confessors of Jesus.

Then the man is recalled, and a browbeating attempt made to bring him round to the opinion of his judges. What form it took is not at first sight quite clear. It is possible to read it thus: At last they too are reluctantly convinced of the fact. Their attempts to disprove it have failed. It is a miracle; a Divine work has been wrought; but they will rather accept the absurd conclusion that somehow this Divine work has been wrought by a false prophet, a sinning man, in the act of sin, than yield to the claims of Jesus. This

suicidal conclusion they will force upon the man himself. "*Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner*" (A.V.). The other and greatly more probable view of their line of argument is, that they still persist in their denial of the facts, and try to coerce or cajole the subject into a like denial. 'Give up your foolish story. It must be false. Tell truth and give glory to God' (R.V.). 'We know that such a thing as you assert could not happen, for the man is a sinner.' The idiom of the words (more accurately rendered in R.V. than in A.V. *), and the reply of the man, who simply stands upon his experience, that now he sees who once was blind, make it almost certain that the latter is the correct exegesis. That is to say, the debate is still about the facts, and the man with great spirit reasserts the facts. This blessed experience of his, "*One thing I know*," is the rock on which all their dogmas must be shattered for him. Their Sabbath law may be right or wrong, their view of Jesus and His character may be as they please, but his assurance of the healing and of the Healer is unassailable.

Then, in the manner of torturing cross-examiners, they begin again to overhaul the details (vv. 26-7); but the man declines to gratify them, unless indeed, as he suggests in well-planted irony, they really at last desire to be of a mind with him and follow Jesus. The judicial sham at this point completely breaks down. They openly abuse him for his obstinacy, and revile him as a disciple of Jesus. They affect to take the rejoicing experience of the seeing man as if it were a mere piece of religious partisanship, meant to thwart and oppose their own. Hereupon the man whose eyes were opened gets his mouth opened too, and finds

* Compare the same idiom in an Old Testament passage: Josh. vii. 19.

a tongue to testify for Jesus. In a few trenchant sentences he exposes their blind and bigoted sophistries. 'Here is the undeniable fact that a blessed work has been wrought—a work of unparalleled might—the giving of sight to one born blind. Yet you affect to know not whence the Worker comes, nor whence His power. By all the teaching of our common faith it is clear that such an One must be of God. He cannot be the notorious transgressor you make Him, for God hears not sinners. He must be a worshipper and a worker of the will of God, for such alone God heareth.' The only reply was another torrent of personal abuse. They reproach the poor man as blinded in his mind if not in his body; altogether born in sins, and unfit to be heard by the spiritual leaders of the people. The scene ends in his excommunication. But who can doubt with whom remained the victory? This beggar who had been blind and was still unlearned was right, when the teachers of the nation were wrong—a signal instance of the due exercise of private judgment. This protesting Israelite stood out against the whole council of the Jews; in his own way, an *Athanasius contra mundum.*

4. The Spiritual Result (vv. 35-41). This last section tells how the Lord, in this instance, completed His work. He who began by conferring on this blind beggar the light of the eye leaves him not till He has endowed him with the light of the Spirit. The bodily cure must lead on to spiritual illumination, that Jesus may be seen to be the Light of life. The subject of the blessing was evidently being prepared for it. "To him that hath shall be given." He has already showed himself a nobler witness than the man (cap. v.) at the pool of Bethesda. Here is one who at once boldly pronounced his Healer to be a prophet,

and so acknowledged His Divine commission. Further, he had worked out, and that under fire of hostile argument, the still higher conviction that his Healer was 'of God,' 'One whom God heareth,' a doer of the Divine will. He recognises, in short, not only the sacred office of Jesus, but His holy character. There remained a supreme step of faith, to which, however, he must be led, as he deserved, after this courageous confession in the face of a whole Sanhedrim of foes.

When Jesus heard that they had cast him out, He carefully sought him, put to him the question which suggested faith in a Divine Redeemer, directly and simply declared Himself to be that Saviour, received the ready confession and the cordial adoration of His now enlightened disciple (vv. 35-8). Thus was fulfilled to this witnessing follower the Lord's own beatitude on those who suffer for righteousness' sake. Thus cast out of the Jewish Church, he is received into the Kingdom of Heaven by the King's own hand. It is worthy of notice that only in this case and in that of the woman at the well* does the Lord directly testify of His Messiahship. What others, more wise and prudent, had to work out by successive steps of reason and faith was revealed in gentlest, simplest form to these babes of the Kingdom. The epithet 'Son of God' in Jesus' question occurs in some ancient readings as 'Son of man.' Precise scholarship maintains that neither of these epithets must needs have been taken by our Lord's contemporaries as equivalent to Messiah. Any single instance of His use of them cannot, therefore, be held as conveying to the hearers a direct assertion of His Christhood. But His teaching was constantly filling out both these epithets and making

* John iv. 26.

them expositions of that full and glorious Christhood which He claimed. We have no need to read into the expression 'Son of God,' as here used by Him, any conclusion of Nicea, Constantinople, or Chalcedon. It was not to enforce a dogma of His identity with the Divine Essence or of His place in the Trinity that Jesus used the phrase. It was simply to lead on this disciple to see in his Healer the Divine Saviour, the image of the one Living and True God. The man who had received his bodily sight at the hand of Jesus now kneels to worship Him, beholding with his inward eye the glory of God's "Only Begotten, full of grace and truth."

In its closing verses (39-41) the chapter brings us back to the truth with which it opened, and shows us one parting flash of its obverse side. The Light of the world is Healer of the blind, but also Judge and Condemner of those who think they see. 'Are we then among the blind so meant?' said the Pharisees. But Jesus answers with an unexpected irony: 'Would God you were so! for in that case you might receive your sight.' "*Now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.*" This whole chapter, it has been remarked, shows modern criticism its own portrait. The defenders of Judaic Sabbatism reasoned thus: God cannot lend His power to a violator of our Sabbath law; hence the cure alleged did not take place. Modern opponents of the supernatural in the Gospel history reason after exactly the same fashion, merely substituting a scientific axiom for a religious statute. 'Miracles do not happen; therefore, however well attested this cure of one born blind, it did not occur.' But the fact holds good against the statute, of whatever kind it be, and will in the end force it to abdicate.*

* See Godet, *in loc.*

XVII.

THE WOMAN WITH A SPIRIT OF INFIRMITY.

LUKE xiii. 10-17.

WE have before us now the last group of our Lord's Healing Miracles. Like the group immediately preceding, they are scattered incidents in a tour of travel. But the journey, or series of journeys, during which they befell belongs to the epoch "when the days were well-nigh come that He should be received up." * Sometimes these wanderings were in Samaria, sometimes in Perea, and anon nearer to the capital. For their general direction is summed up in the words, "He went on His way through cities and villages, teaching, and journeying on unto Jerusalem." † Conversations, addresses, and parables chiefly occupy this section of the history, the record of which belongs almost exclusively to the third Gospel. The only miracles related besides the one before us are the Cure of Dropsy, the Cleansing of Ten Lepers, and the Healing of Bartimeus. These are recorded by St. Luke alone, with the exception of the last, which is common to the Synoptists, and, indeed, belongs to what we may call the Passion journey, and not to the more leisurely pilgrimage

* Luke ix. 51. † Luke xiii. 22.

described only in the third Gospel. Very noticeable in this portion of the history is the variety of scene in which His merciful deeds were done and His words spoken. Sometimes in a private company; sometimes in a gathering of the people thick together;* now it was a dinner-party in the house of a certain Pharisee;† again among "the many thousands of the multitude gathered together, insomuch that they trode one upon another." ‡ Our present incident took place as *He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath Day;* the next on another Sabbath, when He went to eat bread in the house of a chief Pharisee.

This reminds us, once more, of the comparative prominence and frequency of these Sabbath-day cures. § It is quite plain, as this narrative brings out, that nothing but the blindest Pharisaism, in its design to misinterpret Jesus and His work, could have led men to suppose that there was anything in these deeds of His inconsistent with the true observance of the day, or with the spirit of the Divine law. It is as obvious, on the other hand, that only a secularism equally blind and a similar misconstruction of His acts could find in these Sabbath miracles any intention to abolish the day, to take away aught of its sacredness, or loose a jot of its Divine obligation. To distinguish it as He did by working upon it so many of His miracles was to consecrate it to the purposes of His Gospel and to baptize it into the spirit of His Kingdom. By this time it had come to be a recognised fact, joyfully understood by the people, dreaded and hated by His enemies, that whenever congregations were gathered about Him on a Sabbath, His words of truth were

* Luke xi. 29.
† Luke xi. 37.
‡ Luke xii. 1.
§ See pp. 29-31, *supra.*

almost sure to be illustrated by some of those deeds of mercy.

Truly it was Sabbath-day's work, like His Father's care, which no Sabbath rest suspends; like His own Divine mission, which has made the Lord's Day a hallowed weekly pause to so many of earth's toiling and suffering millions.

Nor is it unworthy of notice how many of these Sabbath cures were connected with the religious observance of the day. Several of them were wrought before the public assembly of worshippers in the place where prayer was wont to be made. So far from a design to secularize the Sabbath, or to make its observance less dear than it had been to devout Israelites of old, this practice of His tells all the other way. It was a reward for the diligence and faithfulness of these diseased folks, who, in spite of their ailments, were found in God's house on the sacred day, that they should there meet with their gracious Deliverer. Thus it was He came upon the man with the withered hand, this woman bent double with infirmity, and even the poor creature with the unclean spirit in the Capernaum synagogue. It is to be feared that were He now to revisit our places of worship on the day dedicated to Himself, He would find fewer opportunities than of old to do such works of mercy. Very much slighter ailments than those suffice to keep multitudes of Christian worshippers out of the house of God and away from the appointed means of grace. Our Lord did His wonders of mercy anywhere—in the house, on the public streets—just as everywhere He preached the Gospel. But He put honour upon the ordinances of God by His frequent teachings in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and in like

manner set His special seal on the faith and obedience of the sufferers He met with there.

Vv. 11-3. "*And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.*" It is not quite clear whether this should be regarded as a case of "possession" in any sense. That this woman had "a spirit of infirmity" does not mean that she was of a weak and infirm spirit. She was indeed of a most brave and patient temper. The phrase, however, denotes that her disease had no mere physical origin, but was one of those mysterious derangements of the nervous system which take their rise in the mind rather than in the body. Whether it is meant to be ascribed to the indwelling of an evil spirit is, to say the least, very doubtful. Certainly no domination by an "unclean" spirit, as in other detailed instances, can be supposed in this case.* The woman's habitual attendance at the synagogue, the Lord's title for her, "a daughter of Abraham," the promptness of her thanksgiving to God when she was healed—all forbid the supposition. Yet the direct connection of certain forms of human ailment with the malice of man's Infernal Foe is an idea clearly Biblical. That foe may therefore be said to have bound this daughter of faith in some such sense as that in which he is said to have inflicted boils on Job, or in which St. Paul describes his "stake in the flesh," as a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him.

* The condition was one neither of natural sickness nor of the customary possession. The Lord neve 'laid His hand" upon the actually possessed.—*Stier.*

The sufferer made no application to Jesus for healing. His Sabbath-day patients, for obvious reasons, never did. This one had come to the synagogue because it was her wont, and because the effort to reach it and share in its blessing was one of the ways in which she fought against the advance of her malady. She was there with no design to intercept the Healer and get a cure. There is no indication that she knew Him at all before, far less knew that He was to be in the synagogue that day. In all likelihood the first token she had of His presence, as she sat bent prone in her place, was when the sound of His gracious voice struck upon her ear, and the still more gracious words that He spake as He was teaching won her prepared heart. Then, it is significantly said, He saw her and singled her out for a signal instance of His mercy. The expression afterwards used, when He turned the attention of the ruler and all the congregation to her case, shows how deeply and tenderly He had looked into it. 'Lo!' He said, 'see how long she has suffered.' Her bent form and furrowed face were to Him as a book in which He read the story of her eighteen years' bondage and of her patient struggle to sustain her infirmity.* Her faithful attendance on Divine worship, and perhaps other features to which we have no clue in the narrative, lighted up to Him her genuine religious and spiritual character. For by the title He gives her hardly anything so commonplace can be meant as merely that she was a Jewess. In all probability it was intended to point her out as one of that inner circle of pious believing Israelites—the class to which belonged His own mother, the parents of the Baptist, the devout Simeon, the prophetess Anna—those, namely, "who were look-

* So Cox, *Expositions*, 3rd Series, p. 343 (Fisher Unwin: 1887).

ing for the Consolation of Israel."* At all events, there are sufficient hints that Jesus had found in this woman one specially prepared for His mercy; and this helps to explain the peculiarly spontaneous and triumphant manner in which He proceeds to remove her ailment. He called her to Him. He spoke the word of liberation: "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." Then He laid His hands upon her, and immediately she was cured. There were apparently two elements in the case to be dealt with: one physical—spinal curvature, or dorsal paralysis; the other nervous or mental—some infirmity which paralyzed the will. With His word and touch together the cure was done. The word, majestic and commanding, proclaimed her free from the subtle bond, the root of the mischief, which chained her will. Then His hand laid on her, a sensible aid to her faith, gave strength and suppleness to the disused muscles. As the woman rose erect from her long sad bondage, her grateful piety broke forth on the instant into an irrepressible thanksgiving, a voluntary act of praise before all the people.

Vv. 14-7. "*And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath Day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath Day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on*

* It is easy to believe it more than a coincidence that her story should be recorded by the same evangelist who alone gives us the full account of that pious circle.

the Sabbath Day? And when He had said these things, all His adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him." —The scene had become very offensive to the narrow mind of the presiding elder. This official was the chief of the elders who formed the local Sanhedrim. Though only first among his equals, the virtual rule of the synagogue devolved upon him. He would have the superintendence of the service, and would determine in each case who was to be called upon to read, to conduct the prayers, or to deliver an address. The reputation of Jesus for piety and wisdom was by this time so universally acknowledged, that it was no doubt practically impossible for the most prejudiced synagogue ruler to prevent these duties being assigned to Him whenever He visited any place on a Sabbath. Even this president of a Perean country synagogue had not been able to do so. Jesus was already noted for having set aside Pharisaic opinion as to Sabbath work. This particular Pharisee had probably hoped that no conflict of opinion would arise on the occasion. But that in open congregation, in the place of worship where he ruled, the daring Innovator should perform one of His Sabbath-breaking cures was too much for him. It quite overcame any little sense and proper feeling he possessed. He broke out into angry vituperation. Not daring to attack the Lord directly, nor even the thankful woman, in a covert and cowardly manner He spoke at them both. With an almost ludicrous confusion of meaning he scolds the people, who had been simply onlookers. 'There is a whole set of week-days,' he says, 'in which men are to do work'—as if the Lord's word and touch of blessing were manual labour, or could even be brought under

the Rabbinic laws about medical practice. 'On these days,' he cries to the people, 'come and be healed,' unconsciously admitting the Lord's healing power, but again inconsequently assuming that the woman or any one else there had come on purpose to be cured on the Sabbath.

Jesus answered him with a pungent and well-merited rebuke.* 'You reproach the people, but your quarrel is really with Me. You pretend to be zealous for the law, but you are only jealous of My work. You Pharisees deserve no credit for even conscientiously mistaken views about the sanctity of the seventh day. Your ideas of its observance are quite sane and sensible so soon as a question arises affecting your own material interests. You would have no scruples in relieving the wants of a suffering animal on that day by a certain amount of Sabbath labour. But when I loose from long years of Satanic bondage one of your human sisters, a daughter of the chosen family, and do it with no labour at all, you are filled with horror at the breach of Sabbatic law.' Such hypocrisy is its own complete self-exposure. But this trenchant reply of Jesus completely shuts the mouths of his adversaries, and brings the admiration of the hearers to a height; for not only the words He had spoken, but the glorious things He had done, filled them with joy.

Before we pass from this woman's pathetic and instructive story, let us note its spiritual lesson. She had come to her accustomed place in the synagogue in spite of all weariness and difficulty, and a blessed piece of work it was for her. Had she not gone that day to

* *ὑποκριταί*, "Ye hypocrites," is now the preferred reading. This both relieves the abruptness of the singular and answers better to the *ὑμῶν* ("each one of *you*") immediately following.

the place of worship, it is next to certain she had never met with Jesus. In the way of her usual waiting upon God—a troublesome routine it might have seemed to many—she got the blessing; not merely relief from her bodily chain, but, if we have read her character aright, the glorious liberty of those who saw in Christ Jesus the Lord's salvation. What good cheer is in the story for those who, amid bodily infirmities, mental oppression, or household burdens and afflictions—tempting them to defer their duty to God's house—find their way statedly thither. Every pastor knows that these are often the most blest of all the company that gathers in God's house. For the Master of the house sees them and calls them to Him. To the drooping spirit, to the burdened heart of those who come there just because He bids them, He oft comes, as it were, all unbidden, and makes them glad with an unexpected visitation.

"Sometimes a light surprises
The Christian while he sings;
It is the Lord, who rises
With healing in His wings.
When comforts are declining,
He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining,
To cheer it after rain."*

The spiritual counterpart to this story is to be found in those visits of Christ the Consoler to His people in His house, by which they are loosed from a spirit of bondage. The saints of the pre-Christian dispensation have recorded similar experiences. David, in the thirty-eighth Psalm, says: "I am bent and bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. . . . But I, as a deaf man, hear not, as a dumb man that openeth not his

* Cowper.

mouth. . . . For in Thee, O Lord, do I hope: Thou wilt answer, O Lord my God." So the unknown Psalmist in the seventy-seventh: "I said, This is my infirmity. . . . Thy way, O God, is in Thy Holy Place." And Asaph in the seventy-third: "It was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God." Base are our souls, and bent toward the earth, instead of looking up to heaven. In nowise can we lift ourselves up till the voice of Christ through His Gospel proclaims our liberation, and the hand of His Spirit, laid on us, makes us actually free. "Who can make straight that which God hath made crooked?" Nay! but what sin and Satan have made crooked the grace of God can make straight.

XVIII.

THE DROPSICAL MAN.

LUKE xiv. 1-6.

THIS chapter forms another section in the journal of travel with which all this portion of the third Gospel is occupied. The miracle, with the account of which it opens, gave rise to a conversation of graphic originality, carried on by a series of parabolic illustrations. Chiefly, perhaps, for the sake of introducing these is the healing narrated. The incident in itself is not dwelt on, and the reasoning which arose upon it closely resembles that which we have just considered. It was again on a Sabbath, probably after the synagogue service in some town or village where Jesus had been resting over the day. He had accepted the invitation of a chief Pharisee to eat bread at his house

Ver. 1: "*And it came to pass . . . that they watched Him.*" Marvellous kindness and patience were shown on His part towards those who thus lay in wait to see if He would commit Himself by any deed or word through which they might frame an accusation against Him. But no doubt He went thither because He had truth to teach for which no opportunity was so fit.

Ver. 2: "*And, behold, there was a certain man before*

Him which had the dropsy."* Possibly the man had been drawn in along with the groups of gazers and news-tellers that not uncommonly occupied the verandahs and courts of an Eastern house during an entertainment.† More likely he was placed there by envious design, though unconsciously, no doubt, on his own part. But if the host and his co-religionists, outraging all the laws of hospitality, had laid a trap for their Guest, the result must have astonished them. The man was healed. The spirit of the Sabbath was expounded with surpassing breadth and force; and then there followed "such searching, humbling table-talk as they had probably never heard before." ‡

Vv. 3, 4. "*And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? But they held their peace. And He took him, and healed him, and let him go*" (R.V.). So soon as He came in, Jesus' eye had lighted upon the man as a fit subject for His mercy. He had been so placed as to be in view of all; and their minds were keenly directed to the same object, watching if Jesus would again offend, as so recently He had done. He goes straight to the mark, opens the topic Himself, and anticipates their objections. With the power and authority of a Master, He challenges their disapproval. He appeals to their conscience, their charity, and their religion,—not as loaded with their senseless human additions, but as it stood in the law of God and in the intent of the Lawgiver. 'Is it lawful to heal, to do good, to be merciful on the Sabbath?' They were

* ἦν ὑδρωπικὸς, "was dropsical." St. Luke here, as on some other occasions, uses a technical term.

† Cf. the incident in Luke vii. 36.

‡ Bruce, *Training of the Twelve*, p. 87.

silenced, because there was no answer but one that could be given to the question as thus put in a right way. Upon the reluctant consent, implied in their silence, He at once acted. He took the man, laid His hands on him or embraced him, rid him of his troublesome disease, relieved him from his questionable position, and with delicate courtesy allowed him to withdraw before He resumed the conversation.

Vv. 5, 6. "*And He said unto them, Which of you shall have an ass* [*marg.* son] *or an ox fallen into a well, and will not straightway draw him up on a Sabbath Day? And they could not answer again to these things*" (R.V.). As on the immediately preceding occasion, His appeal to themselves against themselves is irresistible. Had it been not a man but a dumb animal that was in question—a piece of property even, let us say, instead of a suffering fellow-creature—they would have had no scruple in saving its life, even at the expense of some Sabbath labour. The aptness of the parallel should be noticed. In the former story there was an evident fitness between the illustration chosen—the loosing of an ox or ass from the stall—and the merciful deed He had just wrought: the loosing of a believing woman from the chain of her eighteen years' curvature. Here, an animal fallen into a pit of water was the appropriate parallel to a man in danger of death from dropsy. And the 'much more' was equally cogent in this case as in that. If the now preferred reading in ver. 5 be accepted,* the argument rises in cogency. For as not the most scrupulous Sabbatarian could have hesitated

* υἱὸς instead of ὄνος. It is said that the Rabbis had rules which would have enabled them to evade the argument from animal distress (see Buxtorf, cited by Bruce, *Training of the Twelve*, p. 87); but this was unanswerable.

for an instant to rescue a child, a son, fallen into danger of life on that day, no more would He delay, would not even taste bread on this Sabbath afternoon, till He had rescued this object of His compassion. Again, as at the close of the former encounter, His adversaries were reduced to shame and silence. And again no doubt the people rejoiced in the glorious things that were done by Him.

In passing from this the last of the Sabbath healings, let us sum up the teaching to be derived from their number as recorded in the Gospels, from the loving detail with which they are told. We see that Jesus took pains to emphasize the humane element in the original institution as a day of rest, while He rescued it from the exaggerations of Pharisaism. Also, as we have seen, He gave it the sanction of His own observance as a day of public worship and religious congregation. But we note further, that by these deeds of healing He put signal honour upon it as a day for showing mercy. His religion, as St. James has it, is one which makes benevolence a form of worship, and turns acts of human kindness into a liturgy.* It is so for all days; but His own example must ever remind Christians that care for the poor, the sick, and the ignorant are duties specially fitted for the Lord's Day. It is consecrated by His Spirit for the service of man, as well as for the worship of God.

* James i. 27.

XIX.

TEN LEPERS CLEANSED.

LUKE xvii. 11-9.

OUR Lord is upon His last pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The scene on the Mount of Transfiguration and the conversation held there gives us the key to all this part of the history. That scene prefigured the glory to which He was soon to be exalted, and the words spoken showed the way—"the departure which He was about to accomplish"—through the cross to the crown, through the garden and the sepulchre to the throne. He must be received up; therefore He set His face steadfastly to go thither. His route at this particular point is described as being through the midst of Samaria and Galilee, which is thought to mean that He was travelling on the borders of these countries, between the two, without penetrating the interior of either. This note of place prepares us to understand the gathering there of a band of outcasts of mixed nationality.

One day, as He is approaching a village, ten men rush forward to meet Jesus and His company. But just as they are within hail they stop and begin to address Him. You can see the piteous group, with clothes rent, heads bared, and hair dishevelled, a cloth

bound strangely on the lower face and upper lip. They cannot go into the village, so they waylay Him at the entrance of it. They dare not come nearer to clean people than a certain measured distance.* Therefore they "stood afar off," and lifted up their voice as one man. But instead of their usual warning cry, "Unclean! unclean!" or a whining petition for alms, it was a voice of earnest and solemn entreaty, "*Jesus! Master! have mercy on us.*" The Lord's treatment of this case is entirely different from that with which He met the leper of an earlier narrative. When that first subject of His cleansing power came kneeling to Him, Jesus put His hand on him, effected his cure on the spot, and then sent him to the priest for confirmation. Here the procedure is almost reversed. No touch is laid on the lepers, no healing word spoken over them; but at once, "*when He saw them, He said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests.*" On His side there is an elevation of tone, a dash, as it were, of triumphant joy, in this unexpected order.† As concerned them, this treatment was quite in accord with the assurance implied in their cry, and which only did justice to His now well-known and established reputation. So, without cleansing them, without so much as telling them that they were to be cleansed, He bids them take the cure on trust, and proceed to show themselves to the constituted authorities as persons who were lepers no more.

1. Thus was their *faith tested.* It was a strong test, but their perfect confidence in Jesus was equal to it. They instantly set out. They had seen no charm used, had heard no words of cleansing; they felt, as

* As much as one hundred and fifty feet, if the wind were blowing from their direction.

† Godet *in loc.*

yet, no change wrought upon their diseased bodies; but they went, in the firm faith that the thing would be done. They set their face to go to the priest, which would have been mere mockery but for the belief that the cure would come. They acted out their faith. Every step they took away from the presence of Jesus was a proof that they trusted Him; and their confidence was soon rewarded. We can see them going steadily on together, in silent determination, all in their rags, wretchedness, and uncleanness, just as they were when they appealed to Jesus. Right soon, as they went along, a cry of joy broke from one and another and another. The cure had come. New life shot into their wasted frames; the lagging steps quickened into a firm and steady tramp; the shrivelled arms were raised in exulting strength. Their flesh became clean as a little child's, and every man saw before his eyes in his fellows the wonderful transformation which he felt in himself. "*It came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.*"

Could there be a better illustration of faith, from one point of view, than the conduct of these ten men? When Jesus first sent them away, they had no sensible proofs of an answer to their cry; but He having said, "Go show yourselves unto the priests," they took it as implying that their prayer would be answered, and at once did as He bade them. 'How do you know that you are ready to appear before God?' was once asked of one dying; and the answer was, "Sir, God knows that I have taken Him at His word." This is faith. These men took Jesus at His word, and they soon realized the blessedness of so doing. Constantly we stumble at the plainness and simplicity of this act of faith—trusting the bare word of God. We so often say, 'If I could

only feel something, see some improvement, experience some joy, have some evidence in myself, then I would believe.' Such language transferred to these patients of Jesus would run, 'Let us first see some signs of the leprosy removing, feel some pulse of recovered health, then we shall believe, and go to the priests for a certificate.' Put thus, it would be recognised at once as the language of downright unbelief. Yet how often we mock the message of salvation with just such treatment in our hearts, if not in speech! 'O God, Thou tellest me to trust Christ and I shall be saved. I cannot trust Christ, but I can trust my own feeling; and if I felt at once happy and triumphantly holy, I could believe that He would save me.' That is to say, you will trust Christ no farther than you can see or feel. You will set your own heart and its impressions above the word of the Living God, above the promise and gift of the loving Saviour. Oh, let us be done with this most irrational and guilty unbelief! Christ's method of salvation is not that we first feel ourselves to be healed and then believe in Him as our Healer. His prime requirement is to be trusted. "Look unto Me, and be saved." "Come unto Me, . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

2. We come now to the further stage of the story. Jesus' treatment of these ten lepers had in one respect tested their faith. He sent them away with a mere implied promise that they would be healed. They believed Him and got the blessing. But this treatment was further intended to *test their love—i.e.*, to bring out whether their faith was fruitful trust in Him as God's

representative to them, or whether it was a mere formal faith in His office as a healer, so well known that He could not be disbelieved. For these reasons He did the cure, only after they had left Him. He sent them away out of His presence and on the road to the priests, and then healed them. Thus an entirely new situation arose. When diseased folks were healed instantly by Jesus and were still before Him, they could not withhold their acknowledgment. In a case like this it might be very different; and so it proved, for only one of the ten stood the test. His conduct is thus described:—

Vv. 15-6. "*And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.*" As soon as he felt in himself that he was made whole, the man's heart rushed back to the Deliverer. He turned him about on the instant, and was speedily prostrate at Jesus' feet in adoring praise. No doubt he had a formal command to go on. Had he so resolved, he would have had something with which to quiet his conscience. Jesus had bidden him and the rest go to the priests. But love is the best casuist. Love said, 'No! the spirit is more than the letter; though the mere literal instruction seems to be set aside by thus returning, gratitude and love demand it.'* So he turned back, that he might go straight to the Healer and in Him to God—to both, as it were, in one—when he glorified God and gave thanks to Jesus.† This

* As the instruction could be implemented by appearing before any local priest without a visit to the Temple, some commentators suppose that the man may have done so before he went back. But the whole strain of the story is against this supposition.

† Godet bids us notice how δοξάζειν as directed to God and ἐυχαριστεῖν to Jesus are distinguished. But no doubt the sentiments mingled in one common flame of love.

he did as one not loath to let his gratitude be known. Since he had lifted up his voice before in the cry for mercy, should he not lift it up now in the accents of praise? Long before he reached the spot where Jesus and the disciples had halted his glad notes were heard, for he was not ashamed that all should know the story of his cleansing. Now this exception was himself the outcast among these outcasts. Jesus remarks that it was "the alien" alone who was grateful. Keenly enough, no doubt, this sting of unthankfulness in "His own" pierced the heart of the Redeemer. But the incident helps us to look through Christ's eyes upon all mankind. To the Christian, as to his Lord, there are now no foreign or alien peoples. He who has unveiled for us the face of our Father in heaven has removed the wall of partition between His worshippers. He reveals in one the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

How shall we explain the conduct of the others? It is possible that, finding themselves cured, they took no further steps at all, but proceeded as speedily as possible to obliterate all traces of their ever having been lepers—a course which would of necessity preclude their returning to Jesus. More likely, holding to the letter of Jesus' instructions, they went on to the priests, anxious to have the stamp of the law to their restoration. For thus only could they be officially declared clean and restored to society. Then, it is not improbable that they received charges from their priests to take no further notice of the Healer, but return to their homes. Thus we see that they were more attached to the letter than to the spirit; to man they had more respect than to God; in a word, they thought more of themselves than of their

Deliverer;—in this how apt a type of multitudes who externally profit by the name of Christ! It was the civil right these men valued. Escape from the inconveniencies of leprosy was far more to them than the honour of Jesus or even the glory of God in Him. The Samaritan, on the other hand, if we read his story aright, postponed his own interest. It might have been, and perhaps was, said to him, when about to turn back, 'You are not yet pronounced clean and readmitted into society. It is the act of a fool to risk all the benefit at this stage.' But he would listen to no such reasonings. His faith wrought by love, and his love must prove itself by instant thanksgiving. Are we then to say that the others were not believers at all, and this Samaritan alone had faith? Let us mark the Lord's comment on the scene.

Vv. 17-9. "*And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And He said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.*" No doubt the nine had a confidence in Jesus' power which carried them through the test set them. They had that outside faith which sufficed to trust His word for healing. But they had no regard either to the Divine glory or the redeeming might of Jesus. They took His cleansing of them as a mere common thing. At first the miracles of Christ had been fresh and startling. But now, as His love repeated them, men did with Christ's miracles as they do with His Father's bounties —see nothing Divine in them, because they are so common. This their unbelief, their seeing no glory of God in what Jesus did to them, is proved by their unthankfulness: "They returned not to give glory to

God." Jesus Himself, who knew what was in man, was astonished at this instance of ingratitude and irreligion. Unbelief with its baneful blight counterworks the work of God at every point. Times and places there were when Jesus could do no miracle because of men's unbelief. Then, again, when He wrought them abundantly, there were men who saw His miracles and did not believe. Now it has come even to this: there are men experiencing the miracle in themselves and yielding no homage to their Healer. Thus unbelief brings forth its bitter fruit of ingratitude. Even in Christians it makes melancholy havoc, blinding them to the Divine hand in their deliverances, leading them to cheapen God's marvellous grace, and coldly trace to second causes the change that once they rejoiced over as life from the dead. Of men at large unbelief and ingratitude make heathens. It is pronounced to be the very sin of the heathen that "when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." *

On the other hand, Jesus recognised the thankful Samaritan as a true believer; for gratitude to God is, as it were, the link between natural and spiritual religion. In this case the one soon passed into the other. This man's faith was a living tie between his soul and Christ. So with the force of a vital chord it drew him back in love and gratitude to his Deliverer's feet. The others had got their cleansing as a sign of Jesus' power. They were favoured to be its objects out of God's sovereign mercy, as the rain falls and the sun shines on the just and on the unjust. But to him the blessing was a seal of faith, a pledge of larger

* Rom. i. 21.

blessing to follow. The cure was by Jesus' crowning word confirmed, and to it was added the moral cure—a pronounced salvation.

This story shows how little spiritual value or efficacy the Gospel writers—taught by their Divine Master—attach to mere miracle, and how essentially the Gospels differ in this respect from all legendary religious biography. We are here told that men may expect and even experience miracles without any real faith in Jesus,—with belief indeed in His power, but without surrender to His rule. The two ways of receiving a benefit of this kind from Christ are here sharply distinguished. The one seeks a boon from Him; the other receives Him through the benefit. The superficial and external faith gets a healing; the true faith brings salvation and proves itself in discipleship.* To all times this remains an important lesson for the Christian Church. When multitudes are attracted to her ranks, and thousands declare themselves spiritually impressed, we cannot be too thankful. But when the tests of vital Christianity are applied, we are oft driven back on the Lord's question: "Where are the nine?" In practical self-denying work, in thankful generosity and real consecration, where are they? A formal, ceremonial, and ceremonious Christianity is common enough; a desire also for the social advantages and indirect benefits of the Christian profession, without too much of its hazard and responsibility. But for lives of outspoken confession and single-eyed devotion to Jesus among His professed followers, it is to be feared that one in ten would be too high a proportion to fix yet, even in the most favoured portions of Christendom.

* See Edersheim, *in loc.*

XX.

BLIND BARTIMEUS.

MATT. xx. 29-34; MARK x. 46-52; LUKE xviii. 35-43.

MATTHEW speaks of two blind men. Mark dwells upon one, and says it was that well-known blind man, Bartimeus, the son of Timeus. Luke speaks of the case as that of a "certain blind man," and describes it as happening when Jesus was come nigh unto Jericho, or in the neighbourhood of Jericho; whereas Matthew and Mark speak of it as taking place when Jesus was going out of Jericho. Such discrepancies as these are a subject of discussion with two classes of commentators. Some are so impressed with their gravity as to read in them conflict with fact. They seem only able to construe them, in an instance like the present, as proof that no such healing took place. They apparently find it inconceivable that One who went about doing good could have met two such cases so near each other, or that while there were two, as the first Gospel says, Mark and Luke might record only the incidents in which the well-known and strongly marked character of Bartimeus came out. Those writers, again, who insist on exact literal correspondence between the Evangelists are apt to labour too vehemently in the way of reconciling them. The task here is certainly

not difficult. There would be nothing at all surprising in the fact that, though two blind men might be cured that day and even together, one of the accounts should dwell entirely on the case of Bartimeus. The words that passed and the sentiments brought out were the real subject of the record, and not any official catalogue or exact statistics of the persons whom Jesus healed. There are some whose alarm becomes excessive at any variation of statement in the several Gospels, as if it imperilled inspiration. What most imperils the belief in inspiration is to found it upon such mere exact verbal coincidence as these writers seek to discover. What is really proved by these variations is the freedom and independence of the narrators, their honesty, their substantial accuracy, and the truthfulness of their narratives.

The scene was Jericho, the city of palm trees, of the balsam trade, the fragrant city, where a chief tax-gatherer resided because of its produce, in whose neighbourhood robbers lurked because of the rich caravans to be lighted on there. Into that city Jesus had come, surrounded by a thickly gathering multitude. As He passed along, He saw the chief publican in a tree, called him down, received him as a penitent, and abode at his house. Now He is departing from Jericho, preparing to pass through the rocky defiles and brigand-haunted wastes that lay between Him and Jerusalem. But His escort is larger than ever. As it moves off from Jericho fresh multitudes join it. We must imagine not so much a crowd as an orderly procession —some before to prepare the way, more clustering behind, Jesus in the midst, with the disciples immediately round Him. As they move leisurely along, He is teaching,—telling them perhaps that Parable of

the Pounds with which the nobleman entrusted his servants.

Now see yonder blind man seated by the wayside! That is his usual place,—begging his usual occupation. But another idea fills his mind to-day. He has heard much of Jesus of Nazareth. The country is filled with the rumour that He is on His way to Jerusalem to be crowned King of the Jews. To the blind man it has somehow become clear that this is the Christ promised to the Fathers. He is prepared to confess his faith in Him, for he has a great boon to ask of Him. He has taken up his usual place since early morn, is watching with feverish anxiety on the Jerusalem road for the first sign of His approach, when, hark! the tramp of a great multitude. Yes! nearer and nearer it comes. He asks the bystanders or the first comers "*what it meant.*" They answered and told him, "*Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.*" Now then his great opportunity has come. He lifts up his voice, in the words of that most eloquent and simple prayer he has prepared, and repeats it till the time of answer came: "*Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*" Note what obstacles this man's faith overcame.

1. *His circumstances.*—He was but a poor blind man, a customary object of charity. He who was passing by was a great Teacher, a Prophet of the people, reputed to be the Messiah, and probably the future King of Israel. Moreover, He was in the heart of a procession, engaged in teaching, and much engrossed in this momentous crisis of His public life. But Bartimeus was not to be hindered by any of these things. As to the difference in rank between himself and Jesus, he made nothing of it, or rather he made an encouragement of it. When he heard

the name, Jesus of Nazareth! his heart leaped up within him. 'This is the very Person I want to meet. I am poor; He is the Friend of the poor, and to them His Gospel is preached. I am blind; He is the Healer of the blind, and therefore the Saviour for me. I am a despised and forgotten waif by the roadside; He is the King of Israel, the Gatherer of outcasts; the Healer of the broken-hearted, the One who remembers the forgotten. There is a great suitability for poor, blind, begging Bartimeus, son of Timeus, in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, the Christ of God.' As to the engrossment of Jesus, or the crowd surrounding Him, that was no hindrance to Bartimeus, or such an one as his faith turned into a help. What better could he wish than to be in the way when Jesus of Nazareth passes by? It is for him the accepted time, the day of his visitation. If any one is hindered from coming to Christ by considerations of environment, be this the answer of faith: The worse your circumstances, the more need you have of Christ, the more evident is it that you are of those to whom He is offered and for whom He is intended. When He is nigh, as He is in this word of faith which is preached, let no argument find place in your heart for a moment that the time is unsuitable, or that there may be a more convenient season. He is passing by; raise to Him, like Bartimeus, the urgent prayer, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me."

2. *The desire of worldly advantage.*—Here was a great procession coming. In an ordinary case Bartimeus would doubtless have laid himself out to make a harvest of the passing caravan. On this occasion he made up his mind to forego that altogether. He weighed the two things, and he said to himself, 'No! no alms

to-day; I will direct my whole efforts to getting a cure from Jesus of Nazareth.' He did not attempt both things, but deliberately sacrificed the alms-getting for the eyesight. Doubtless he would have been a fool to do otherwise. Yet that is the folly men are committing every day, and not the thoughtless alone among men. Those who have some glimpse of the priceless value of spiritual light and peace, yet let year after year leave them as it found them, because they are too busy in the world to seek salvation, or too much afraid of losing present advantage to set aside its claims even for a season and "count the cost" of their immortal nature. Jesus and His multitudes are passing by while some of us are busy gathering pennies by the wayside. A soul in earnest, a soul prepared for the Master's grace, will hold it of such urgent moment, that everything must stand aside till this great question be settled.

3. *The opposition of others.*—Bartimeus had begun his cry betimes. As soon as he learnt what the approaching footsteps meant, he started it and kept it up till the foremost part of the procession reached the place where he sat. When these forerunners, as Luke tells us—"they which went before"—rebuked him that he should hold his peace, it did not silence Bartimeus. As the procession thickened and came opposite this clamouring petitioner, many charged him that he should hold his peace, "*but he cried out the more a great deal.*" What were the motives of the crowd in trying to silence Bartimeus we are not told. Perhaps the vulgar notion that it was improper for a common beggar like him to take up the time and attention of Jesus; perhaps, that with all their popular enthusiasm for Jesus, they were not pleased at the blind man for the boldness of his ex-

pression that Jesus was the Christ. This is the rather confirmed by the contrast between the name quoted by his informants and that used by Bartimeus in his cry. They told him it was "Jesus of Nazareth" that passed by. But all the three Evangelists are careful to record that this petitioner firmly based his plea on the Christhood, "Thou Son of David."* The crowd were the professed friends of Jesus, yet were ready to suppress one whose faith went further, was more outspoken and enthusiastic than their own.

It is not easy to conceive any obstacle in the way of the spiritually anxious more stumbling than this, when the professing, and sometimes even the real followers of Christ, object to the ardour of their expressions or the evident feeling they show. 'This is going too far. It is excitement. It is extravagance. There is no need to make such a stir. It disturbs the Church.' The real meaning is, It puts us about, it suggests an uncomfortable suspicion that we are not in earnest, when we see some spirit-stirred ones counting all things loss to win Christ, and overturning the cold formal decency of the Church with their new-born fervour. But if such anxious ones are really led of God, they will cry so much the more; the water of discouragement flung upon the flame of their desire will only make it burn the higher and the hotter, for He who moves their hearts is all the while secretly pouring oil upon that heavenly flame. See, too, the reward that awaits a

* The signal use of this Messianic title in connection with cures of blindness has been already pointed out (see p. 241). Westcott remarks that healing of the blind is exclusively a miracle of the Gospels. No cases occur in the Old Testament or in the apostolic healings. Besides the detailed cures, all of which we have now discussed, general notices of our Lord's restoring sight occur: Matt. xi. 4, 5, xv. 30, xxi. 14; Luke vii. 22.

persevering soul seeking grace and Christ. When Bartimeus kept calling and took no discouragement, and when at length Jesus bade him come, it was the same crowd that had at first discouraged the petitioner that then cheered him on. They turned their tune altogether, and instead of "*Hold thy peace,*" they said, "*Be of comfort, rise; He calleth thee.*" Thus, says Augustine, does it often happen in the conflict of a spiritual soul. "If a man will only despise these obstacles from a world which calls itself Christian and overcome them, if despite of all opposers he will go on until Christ is evidently and plainly with him, then they who began by reprehending will finish by applauding, they who at first said, 'He is mad,' will end with saying, 'He is a saint.'"*

Now the procession has reached that point when Jesus Himself comes opposite Bartimeus. As soon as the cry with its unusual title and its imploring tones meets the Saviour's ears, He comes to a standstill. 'Who is that man,' He says, 'that I hear crying?' Jesus, straitened till his Jerusalem work be done, could not pass the cry of the needy. He must needs pause and hear it. 'It is only blind Bartimeus, that sits constantly at this place begging.' 'But it is not alms he is asking to-day: where is he?' 'He is sitting on the bank there over against us.' 'Call him,' He says. 'Bring him unto Me.' This is how Christ finds those that inquire after Him. We know that He is found of those that seek Him not, surprises those that look not for Him, singles out for search those that had forgotten Him. How certainly then, as this story shows, is He the Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. It was a moment of rare triumph for Jesus. He is attended

* See Trench, *in loc.*

by a joyful crowd. But He turns, how characteristically, from the happy throng to the one miserable man who needs His help.

The words which made the suppliant aware of Jesus' call were most probably spoken, as we have said, by the very people who before strove to silence him. 'Now is your chance; Jesus is bidding you come. No fear now—you are a saved man; it is as good as done.' Look at him! How he springs to his feet. Is this the feeble mendicant that used to sit yonder? See how he tosses from him the wrapper in which he was wont to protect himself from the weather. "*Casting away his garment, he rose, and came to Jesus.*" And to what a Saviour he has come! "*Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?*" A royal, nay a Divine style, surely this; 'Name thou thy wish; it is Mine to fulfil it.' And what has opened Jesus' lips to such a golden saying? What but the golden key of outspoken faith: "Thou Son of David." 'Well then,' says Jesus, 'I am Messiah and King for thee. What wilt thou have out of all My royal treasures?' Yes! but, petitioner, express thy petition plainly and pointedly. "Have mercy on me!" But what specific mercy? To be particular in prayer is a form of faith. It illustrates and evidences the man's entire trust in Jesus to have him say distinctly as Bartimeus immediately does, "*Lord, that I might receive my sight.*" No doubt Jesus knew what he wanted; but He will have him tell it out, that in the fuller exercise of his faith he may be more prepared to receive the blessing. To hear some people on prayer one would think it was chiefly meant to inform and to move God. But at least one-half the power of prayer is to prepare us for the mercy which God is waiting and

anxious to bestow. "The waterman in his boat, that with his hook takes hold of the shore, doth not thereby pull the shore to the boat, but the boat to the shore: so in prayer, we do not so much draw the mercy to ourselves, as ourselves to the mercy." It is one of the secrets of the spiritual life that we get from God just as much as we can take, that is, as much as we truly ask.

So we come to the cure. There was on this occasion no process as at Bethsaida, no intervening actions as at Siloam's pool, but for a ripe faith a ready response. "*Jesus had compassion, and touched their eyes*" (Matt.). "*Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole*" (Mark). "*Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight*" (Luke). The pertinacious vitality of faith had proved itself in this instance, and it met, according to Christ's method, with an instant and abundant reward. It was proved not only by the blind man's firm conviction of Jesus' Messiahship, but by his irrepressible expression of it, by his conquest of all the obstacles put in his way, by his joyous alacrity when Jesus called him, by his prompt application of Christ's offered grace to his most particular need. And now, as all the Evangelists add, the proof was crowned by the first use he made of the new gift of sight. He left his alms, forgot his garment, and "followed Jesus in the way." From this conduct the Lord received honour both direct and indirect, for all the people when they saw it swelled His praises. These two forms of service to Christ react upon each other. If all who know about Him were to profess Him, there would be much increase of spiritual light in the Church. If all who profess Christ were to experience what they profess, there would be much increase of spiritual heat. If all

who have experienced Christ were to live up to their experience of His mercy, the Church would be like a mass of molten metal in the midst of a cold world—the world, indeed, would be set on fire, and the whole earth would be filled with His glory.

III.

THE THREE RAISINGS FROM THE DEAD.

THE THREE RAISINGS.

THIS group forms the climax of our Lord's mighty works. In the others He showed Himself Lord of nature and Healer of men. In these He is seen to have the keys of Death, and of the world beyond. Of the three instances related, one—that of the ruler's daughter—occurs in all the Synoptic accounts; the other two belong respectively to the third and fourth Gospels. That these were all the occasions on which He grappled with Death, is clear from the character of the events, and from the explanation suggested in each case. The exceptional occurrence seems to require exceptional reasons. One has been just hinted at. Perhaps it was not fitting that the Lord of life should ever encounter Death without disturbing his rule. At all events, these are the only instances in which the Gospels bring Jesus face to face with man's last enemy, and in each He breaks the spell. When His own time came to enter Death's dominion, He could not be holden of it. There is another reason which is common to all the three. The cases exceptionally appealed to His compassion. One was a widowed mother's only son. Another, the ruler's only child. The last, His own dear friend and the beloved brother in the family Jesus loved. But

there are some more special reasons which deserve attention. Although we shall presently treat the three in the customary order of their increasing marvellousness, the order of occurrence brings us first to the incident at Nain. There seems, at first sight, no reason suggested why our Lord should disturb the reign of Death in this case, but simply a characteristic impulse or outburst of Saviour-like pity. That there may have been some spiritual motive connected with the youth himself we dare only conjecture. To the recording Evangelist it seemed the fitting crown to a series of the Lord's miraculous labours. In the case of Jairus' daughter no raising from the dead was at first thought of or expected. The anxious father came to solicit Jesus' healing touch. But when the message reached Him that the child was dead, He had to determine whether there should be an open failure of His help, a bitter disappointment to the father, or whether Death should be, in this instance, made to yield back his prey. The precautions for privacy and reticence as to the miracle are fully explained upon this view. In the highest instance—that of Lazarus—we are furnished with detailed reasons in the narrative itself why the sickness was allowed to be fatal, and how the whole was so overruled and arranged that the recall of His friend from the dead should crown the miraculous workings of Jesus, and lead on through strange and dark steps to the glory of the Cross and the Resurrection.

These great works of Jesus were not, as we have repeatedly said, bare signs to arrest men's attention—not mere portents or proofs of His Divinity. They were portions and instalments of His redeeming work; in them He both rescued men and destroyed the work of their foe. This was well seen when He dispelled

disease and restored to men physical powers blighted or lost by sin; still better was it seen when He baffled evil spirits and cast them out. Now best of all when He thus put His hand on the empire of Death. No doubt it was but a partial instalment of his victory over it. Nothing is gained by overstating the place and power of the Gospel miracles. True, there are only these three instances recorded in which He disturbed the Kingdom of the Dead before His own Resurrection. True it is, also, that what these three obtained was not an awaking to the life glorified and immortal, but restoration for a time to their earthly bodies before those bodies had perished. They had not yet received the spiritual or resurrection body. Nevertheless, it is an instalment, an infeftment, a taking possession of the house of the dead, such as implies His right and power and intention of rifling it when His time comes. It gives us boldness to say, "He hath abolished death." For He calls it now by a new and a softer name. The dead in Christ are asleep, not dead; for they who are to rise again in glory are meanwhile but in a kind of slumber. Thus He recalled these three from Death's grasp: one newly departed—one as he was being carried out to burial —one four days entombed, and over whose remains Death's corruption may possibly have begun to creep; and they all instantly heard the voice of the Son of God and lived. It is enough! See behind them the whole company of the redeemed who shall rise up in that day and stand upon their feet an exceeding great army! Four days, or forty years, or four thousand years,—what matters the lapse of time. It is but a sleep, when so certainly they shall be called in the morning. "Them that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

I.

THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS.

MATT. ix. 18, 19, 23-6; MARK v. 22-4, 35-43; LUKE viii. 41-2, 49-56.

AMONG other reasons why this beautiful story should take precedence in this group is the fact that it alone, of its kind, belongs to the 'Triple Tradition.' Matthew records it very briefly, Luke more at length, Mark with most detail, whose account, therefore, we shall mainly follow. With his usual graphic force he lets us see the moment, so to speak, when the action begins. Jesus and the twelve have just landed from the Gadarene visit; they are still on the margin of the lake, when, lo! a petitioner falls on his face before the Lord. It is Jairus, one of the rulers in the synagogue of Capernaum, where the Lord had so often taught. Most likely he was one of the elders who had entreated Jesus' help on a former occasion for the centurion and his servant. Now it is his own case; his little daughter is lying at the point of death.* He came with intense earnestness, "*fell at Jesus' feet, and besought Him greatly.*" With an almost incoherent eagerness he cries, "*Come and lay Thy hands upon her, that she*

* ἐσχάτως ἔχει said by grammarians to be a late Greek expression. It corresponds to the Latin *in extremis*.

may be healed; and she shall live" (ver. 23). Jairus had doubtless seen much of Jesus. He had very good reason to be convinced of His power, and accordingly expresses unhesitating faith, so far as the words of his prayer go. Yet we never read before this that Jairus was a disciple. Never, till the hand of Death seemed laid on the daughter, had the father yielded full homage to Christ. For sorrow and death are strong messengers, and men will listen to them who have shut their ear to all other—

> "Eyes that the preacher could not school
> By wayside graves are raised,
> And men say, God be pitiful,
> Who ne'er said, God be praised."*

Ver. 24. Jesus at once went with him; so did the disciples; so did all the people, forming a vast and crowded procession. Through the streets of His favourite town, they closed round Him, followed Him, and "thronged Him." What a picture is this of the Saviour in the fulness of grace and truth, in the beauty of redeeming love—travelling, voyaging, everywhere, in the house, at the synagogue, by the wayside, on the crowded street, His ear open to the cry of human woe, and His hand ready to help. So full of compassion is He, that it runs over, so to speak—as was notably shown that day. He was hastening with Jairus along the street, the crowd hanging with delight on His every step and pressing after Him. Ah! there's a poor woman, wanting to be healed by Him, and she has always missed Him hitherto. Tradition says she belonged to another part of the country. She had come to Capernaum as the likeliest place to find Him. For days, perhaps for weeks, He had not

* Mrs. Browning.

been there, or she had not been able to put herself in His way. She was unclean, and could not go to the synagogue. She never had courage to come forward in any public assembly. Now is her first chance likely to be lost. As fast as the eagerness of a distracted parent can urge Him to go, He is on His way to see the dying maiden. Surely no hope for this poor woman to-day. Nay! Jesus has always time to help and heal. He can heal two or two thousand at once. 'Fear not, hidden one! Thou art not unknown nor unregarded! Time enough to come behind Him in the press and touch His garment and be healed.' Time for more. What mercy, and what majesty of mercy, in Jesus! He takes time. He talks to the woman, brings out her faith, confirms her cure, finishes His work in her; then calmly turns again to the case of Jairus and his child, as if there had been no urgency at all.* As neither there really was. The interruption on the way, the healing of the woman, the conversation with her, the completion of the cure, had occupied some time. And the delay of these minutes served somewhat the same purpose in the glory of the event as did the four days' delay in the case of Lazarus. Meanwhile the maiden had died, and the intelligence had just come from the ruler's house.

Vv. 35-6. "*While He yet spake . . . only believe.*" There is a slight apparent difference in the Evangelists' account of this part of the story. Matthew makes Jairus say at the first, "My daughter is even now dead: but come lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live."† This, however, is only a condensed or abridged account. When the father left his house to go for Jesus, the child was just dying. Even when he found the Lord,

* See at p. 229, *supra*. † Matt. ix. 18.

he had every reason to fear that the child would be gone before He could arrive. Mark tells us more fully what happened. The delay with the woman and the conversation with her proved fatal, as the outsiders thought. A message came from the ruler's house: "*Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?*" Jesus catches the words as they are uttered. He overheard while it was being said, and took the word out of the messenger's mouth. He spoke before Jairus had time to think a hopeless or unbelieving thought. He checks fear ere it begins to rise. "*Be not afraid, only believe*"—language which all the more precludes the idea of a mere apparent death.

At this point the Lord separates Himself from the crowd. He takes only three out of the twelve Apostles —for the first time making that selection of the same three, repeated more than once afterwards. As they approached the house the noise and tumult of Oriental wailing became apparent. Neighbours assisted; in many cases mourners were hired, and even musicians—the "minstrels" mentioned by Matthew—to make lament over the dead. As Jesus and His company entered the house He said, "*Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*" This expression did not mean that the death was unreal, that it was only a swoon. He used the same expression afterward of Lazarus; and when misunderstood He put it plainly, 'Lazarus is dead.' We have ample proof of the reality of the death of the child in the present case. The poor father's impression when he went away; the words of the messengers that met them; the considerable time which must have elapsed—for the minstrels and mourners already occupied the room; above all,

the scorn with which His words were received by those who supposed them to be literal,—all this is doubtless recorded to bring out in clearer light the reality of the miracle.

Jesus knew well what He said when He uttered these precious words: "The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth." The hearers laughed, and, if they had only known it, there was good reason why their mouth should be filled with laughter and their tongue with melody. There was One come among them to abolish death—to break that ancient, world-wide reign, and turn again the captivity of mortal men. Oh! it was truly an occasion for laughter, not of scorn, but of joy. How calm and sure He is! 'She is not dead, but sleepeth. I am come to awake her out of sleep.' He that quickens the dead is well entitled to use such language. He "calleth those things which be not as though they were." Human nature has oft sought to anticipate this word. All languages and all nations have striven to soften the sharpness of death by calling it a slumber. Our burial-places we call 'cemeteries,' taking the word from the old Pagan Greeks, who meant by it a sleeping apartment. 'Tis not said of the blessed dead alone, for wicked kings in the Old Testament are said to "sleep with their fathers." And of those that shall rise to shame and everlasting contempt it is said, "they sleep in the dust."* The blessed word here is that other one—"not dead." He hath abolished death. "O death! I will be thy plagues. O grave! I will be thy destruction." That is what nature could never reach, could never dream. Therefore is He now entitled to take that other tender, precious word "sleepeth," and use it as no longer a figurative but a real description

* Dan. xii. 2.

of the state of His own departed ones—waiting His resurrection voice; as much within reach of it as Lazarus in his tomb at Bethany; as the young man at the gate of Nain; nay, as near to it as this little maid, whom a touch of the hand and a gentle whisper sufficed to restore to life. Dead as she appeared to human sense, to Him she only slept.

"*Give place!*" He said to the noisy mourners in the house of Jairus, "Give place!" as He put them all forth and shut in Himself and the three disciples, with the parents only and the corpse of their little maid. Note it well, believing mourners! Say to your natural regrets, to your worldly fears and griefs, to the sorrow that worketh death, "Give place!" See that they hinder not Christ and His comforts to come in. Jesus of Nazareth is at the door. He says to your disquieting and vexing thoughts, "Give place!" Here is Christ the Consoler come to thee. He brings with Him "strong consolation," fetched from the Paradise where thy departed rest in the Lord, from the future glory to be revealed when thy ransomed ones shall return to their own border. 'Our friend is not dead, but sleepeth,' and so sleeps that he shall "do well" in the day when the Son of man returns in His power to awaken His own out of sleep.

When He had put all the others out, the scene within the house is simply and beautifully described (ver. 40). "*He taketh the father and mother of the damsel, and them that were with Him*" (*i.e.*, only the three Apostles before named), "*and entereth in where the damsel was lying.*" The house is now quiet and still. They are in the presence of the dead—the parents believing, hoping against hope—the three witnesses chosen, no doubt, because of their preparedness of spirit. There, in an

atmosphere of faith, of calm and reverent expectation, not before a scornful company, nor even in presence of curious onlookers, Jesus does this mighty work. He takes the corpse by the hand. He says, "*Talitha cumi! Maid, arise!*" St. Mark, only, gives the very words in the old Syriac,—the Jewish vernacular of the day; the language known to the child, the language of the house and common life,—gives them, as they were no doubt remembered by Peter, who oft described the scene in his preaching, and whose cycle of recollections of the Gospel history formed the basis of the narrative written by the pen of his companion Mark.* "Maid, arise!" The little one looked up, arose, walked, for she was twelve years old. Luke at this point uses the words, "And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway." This leaves no shadow of doubt as to how the incident was conceived of by the disciples. It was no recovery from swoon or mere apparent death. It was the case of a dead person come to life again. "*And Jesus commanded to give her meat.*" How like Him! How calm and sure He was, when He entered the house, of what He had come to do! How full of quiet power! He took her by the hand and said, 'Arise!' How thoughtful and mindful of every detail, as if He had been a kind, careful physician! 'Forget not to give her meat.' We may dare say He waited till He saw it given to her, and she ate and was refreshed.

Vv. 42-3. "*And they were astonished with a great astonishment. And He charged them straitly that no man should know it.*" The reasons why this work was done in such privacy are tolerably plain. Why the noisy mourners with their scorn and laughter are put

* See p. 265, *supra*.

forth is evident. He casts not his pearls before swine. Why the townspeople and neighbours are excluded we may judge to be that they had seen enough of His mighty works, and He would not lavish or blazon His miracles before them. Not even the twelve were permitted to see this work, only the favoured three who afterwards saw the glories of Tabor and the sorrows of Gethsemane. He did not admit even a single relative or inmate of the house, except the parents, and He charged them that no man should know it. It is all in keeping with the abstinence our Lord practised in the exercise of His miraculous power. There is no prodigality about His miracles. Plentiful when the relief of human misery and the entrance of spiritual light were His objects, they were never wrought merely to compel belief or overawe mankind. All these reasons converge, as has been already said, in the case of the supreme wonder—calling one back from the dead. The character, therefore, of the miracle, as of a kind to be very solemnly wrought and very seldom repeated, explains the precautions taken to secure its privacy, though of this work also we are told that the fame of it went abroad into all that land.

This story suggests many analogies of the way in which the Saviour quickens the spiritually dead.

1. Those whom He calls early are called easily. The little maid was dead,—but in death was beautiful as sleep. Her dear remains were not yet dressed for the tomb,—far less carried out for burial. So when Jesus came to raise her, the ease, the quietness, with which He did it—taking her by the hand, in a tender word calling her again to life—irresistibly suggests the easy recall of a spirit not far gone on its journey to the world unseen. In the young man's case He laid his

hand on the bier; in Lazarus' case he cried with a loud voice. Here all is so simple one cannot help drawing out the spiritual analogue—viz., that the early called are easily awakened. They are not bound in the grave-clothes of evil habit. They are not corrupting in the loathsomeness of open sins. They are not hardened by long-standing worldliness and indifference. So when the Lord calls them, it is quietly and gently. He opens their hearts like Lydia's. The dew of their youth, the early grace, comes gently down. Children and young people are easily awakened. And this is exactly what we should expect. Instead of thinking that children and youth are less likely to be graciously impressed, we ought to reckon them the likeliest of all within the Christian circle. In the Christian family and Church early religious impression should be, in point of fact is, the commonest form of converting grace. But let us learn from the words and acts of Jesus here how it should be followed up. Young converts need instruction. They want building up in the faith. They lack knowledge; they cannot have experience. They know not so much either of sin or of salvation as those converted older and later. Therefore they must needs be spiritually fed and sustained. They should have interesting ministry, instructive books; be led on to search the Scriptures, and thus learn wisdom. "He commanded that something should be given her to eat."

2. Such early impression is truly Divine work. All we say about its simplicity or likelihood is comparative. The little maid was really dead. No power could raise the dead but that of Jesus, for it was Divine. When we speak of it as easy by comparison, we invite no reference to man's ease or difficulty; with man it is impossible. So with every conversion; it is a Divine

act. This kind and form of early grace we are greatly encouraged to expect. Nevertheless, it is the Divine Saviour who takes each by the hand and lifts them up. "Maid, arise!" What words of power are those of Jesus! His "Come" gives the lame power to walk. His "Look" gives eyes to the blind. His "Hearken" opens deaf ears. His "Arise" causes the dead to stand up on their feet and live. Let us hear the "voice of the Son of God." Give what Thou commandest and then command what thou wilt. Somebody said Luther's words were half-battles; but the words of Jesus are whole creations. They are spirit and life. He makes the very thing He bids. "Awake! arise! and Christ shall give thee light." And it is all done in quietness, that spiritual resurrection. At least, it is not done amid the laughter of the scornful. No! nor before the curious multitudes. "The kingdom cometh not with observation!" When prayerful, hopeful, believing friends are pleading for your soul; or, perhaps,—more plainly to set forth the sovereign power of Jesus,—when friends and spiritual advisers have said their last word, and no light has come into your dead heart,—quietly, you know not how, nor whence, when you are alone with God, it steals upon you like the dawn of day. His coming has been as the morning, and like morning songs His voice.

II.

THE WIDOW'S SON.

LUKE vii. 11-17.

THIS narrative is found in Luke only. The time of its occurrence is apparently fixed by its connection with the previous story of the centurion and his servant. "The next day," or "shortly thereafter,"* came what we now read. Evidently it occurred in the height of the Lord's first Galilean ministry or Capernaum labours, and before the message of John Baptist's disciples to Jesus, so that in the list of wonders reported to John was included the raising of the dead. The incident is briefly and simply told.

Ver. 11. "*And it came to pass the day after, that He went into a city called Nain.*" The place is nowhere else mentioned in Scripture. A village still bears the name, with old rock-tombs adjoining it, and corresponding in exact locality, about three miles south of Mount Tabor, on the slope of a hill which the traveller climbs on the way from Galilee to Jerusalem. Our Lord went to it from Capernaum either on a preaching tour,—for it was about a convenient day's journey from that

* According as we have ἐν τῃ or ἐν τῷ ἑξῆς—*i.e.*, as the word understood is ἡμέρᾳ or χρόνῳ.

place; or, what is still more likely, He took it as the first stage of one of His pilgrimages to Jerusalem which we know He made about this time. The fact that "much people went with Him and many of His disciples" would suit either of these suppositions, but more especially the latter.

Ver. 12. "*Now when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.*" The people of the East always bury their dead outside their towns. The time was probably towards evening, for Jesus' journey was most likely closing for the day; but in those countries they must bury soon and whenever they can. The train of the Prophet of Galilee and the funeral procession met at the gate; so that a natural and necessary pause was made by both parties. Luke's description of the funeral prepares us for what is to follow. It was that of a young man—a man in the prime of life; the support and pillar of his home; the only son of his mother, and that mother a widow. The case is just such as arrests and solemnizes us on our own streets, stirs the sympathy of neighbours, or even excites the attention and interest of a community. So it was that day. The widow, according to Eastern custom—a custom followed, too, in some Western nations—was in the funeral train, and "much people of the city was with her."

Ver. 13. "*And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.*" 'The Lord' as a title for Jesus is comparatively rare in the Gospels, occurs oftenest in this one, and is therefore perhaps here used as another note of preparation for what is to come. That He felt for the widow is what we are prepared to expect. He had compassion on the blind,

on the sick, on the palsied, on the lepers, on the possessed, and how much more in this case of bitter and sore bereavement! How truly human is His compassion!—"When the Lord saw her." His emotions were as genuine and simple as those of the purest child. His attention was aroused by the crowd. He was moved by the sympathizing looks of the people. His quick eye singled out at once the bereaved mother. His compassion fastened upon her, and He said unto her, "Weep not!" Here is something not quite usual. A man at once compassionate and wise does not try to check natural grief. He rather endeavours to find some consideration that will abate and moderate it. But here is no argument, no consolatory words; only a simple, weighty, authoritative summons: "Weep not!" This arouses attention, stirs expectation of something to come. The bearers of the bier or open coffin, already checked by the concourse of people, came almost to a standstill. The crowd gathered closer, and Jesus drew nearer to the bier.

Ver. 14. He laid His hand upon it for a moment. Struck by the majesty and boldness of the action, the bearers stood entirely still. The idlers by the gate rose up in wonder. The people of Nain began to take a closer look of the Prophet. The people of Capernaum and other followers in His train with the disciples drew near in breathless attention. They were doubtless more prepared from all they had seen to guess what might follow, but on that account more wonderstruck than all the rest. 'What now!' said they to themselves. 'We have seen Him bid the fevered patient in a moment into calmness and health. He has spoken the word, and the leper became clean, the paralytic took up his bed and walked, the raving

demoniac became sane,—but this is Death! We have seen Him call men's lives across the line between sickness and health, weakness and strength, madness and sanity; but across this gulf—the great gulf between this world and that other—will He ever dare or be able to call? Yes! He speaks—speaks to the corpse. With a word as simple, as natural, as authoritative as that with which He arrested the weeping mother, He speaks to her dead son: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!"

"Arise!" Nothing but that—not another word. As easily as we awaken a sleeper, Jesus raises the dead.*

Ver. 15. "*And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak.*" A dead man no more—breaking the silence of death, bursting forth into speech, and such speech as we can well imagine. Adoring praise of his Divine Deliverer; glad recognition of his surrounding and astonished friends; comforting assurances to his startled mother, half afraid to believe amid her tears, that he was really living.

And the deed that had begun in sympathy and compassion for the bereaved mother ended in real and substantial comfort. As Elijah to the widow of Zarephath, "See, thy son liveth;" as Elisha to the lady of Shunem (almost within view of Nain), "Take up thy son,"—so here Jesus restores this son to his parent. It was, so far as we can judge, the first instance in which our Lord had raised the dead. It would have been

* In reply to a groundless sarcasm of Keim, Godet says, "The resurrection is in no way attributed to the touching of the bier, but to command of Jesus. The interruption of the connection between the soul and the body in death, as in sleep, is only relative; and as man's voice suffices to re-establish this connection in any one who is wrapt in slumber, so the word of the Lord has power to restore this interrupted connection even in the dead."—*Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, in loc.*

very natural in the young man, so marvellously restored, thenceforward to have left his home and accompanied Jesus in His journeys. It might have been very helpful to our Lord's work to have carried with Him where He went this living witness of His power to quicken the dead. But we read that our Lord sent him back to his own natural sphere of life,—"He delivered him to his mother."

Ver. 16. "*And there came a fear on all.*" It was no wonder. A dead man sat up and spoke; a corpse carried out on his bier this moment, and the next a living son restored to a joyous mother. And all this not done in a corner, but at the gate of a city, in the open highway, in the presence of a great crowd, in a manner the most absolutely God-like—no preparation, no previous knowledge between the parties, no pomp of words, no labour of prayers, but a single command, and "he that was dead sat up, and began to speak." The first feeling of terror or natural fear, which we all instinctively understand, at the sight of one come to life from the dead, gave place the second moment to the still deeper and holier feeling of awe and reverence for Him who by a word had called the dead to life. "*And they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited His people.*" This was the crowning miracle of the Capernaum labours or the period of our Lord's first Galilean ministry. We have seen that already the whole of that country was filled with His fame as a Teacher and Healer, but this raised His fame to another degree altogether. The news of it travelled to the south as far as Judea. It rang in the streets of the capital. It reached the Baptist in his lonely prison at Machærus beyond Jordan. And he sent his messengers to settle for all his followers and for himself

the question whether Jesus had fully and finally accepted the promise of His infancy and of His baptism —that He should be the Lord's Christ, the world's Saviour. "Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?" Meanwhile the people of Galilee, as represented at Nain, were solving that question for themselves. They said, "*A great prophet is risen up among us.*" Only the greatest prophets had in former ages raised the dead. Perhaps the Prophet also was in their minds, for they added, "*that God hath visited His people.*" It was one of those rare moments in the life of the Son of man when the confession of Pentecost seemed on the point of being forestalled. But it could not be till He should suffer and be glorified.

The place of this miracle in St. Luke's Gospel, as that of crown or climax to the mighty works of a whole period, suggests the arguments to be derived from it. "No man can do these miracles except God be with him," was an inference long since established. But now there is more gained than merely to prove that Jesus has 'God with Him' as other great prophets have had. Works like this, taken along with His words and teaching and claims, go far to prove that He is Himself God. We notice as we read these miracles one after another that it came to be not merely the thing done, but the way He did it, which struck the spectators and made them think of Him as more than man. The ease, the majesty—the Godlikeness, in short—told on men's minds as He raised a cripple or healed a withered hand—much more when He cast out an evil spirit. "What new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth He the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." "Who is this that forgiveth sins also? There is none that forgiveth sins, but *God* only." There were they

on the brink of the truth, unwittingly and unwillingly. Now at the point we have reached, it is not so much the fact of His raising the dead as the manner of it which suggests His Divinity. Sometimes a like miracle had been done by Divinely commissioned prophets of old. Yet the difference is very striking. Here all is done in His own name,—not, as in the Old Testament instances, in the name of Jehovah; but with a simple, "I say unto thee." In a manner, too, so direct and majestic. Notice only the fewness of the words spoken. There are just six words in the original used by Jesus in the entire transaction,—two ("Weep not") to comfort the mourning mother; and four ("Youth! I say, Arise") to restore the dead son. While the whole resurrection power is condensed into the one word, ARISE. The contrast between this and any such miracle by prophet or apostle is obvious, and the inference points to nothing short of absolute Divinity. In the eloquent words of a great French preacher, "Elijah raised the dead, it is true; but he was obliged to bend himself many times over the body of the child he raised. He breathes; he stretches himself out; he paces up and down. It is easy to see that he is invoking a power beyond himself; that he is demanding from the empire of the dead a soul which is not subject to his voice, and that he is not himself the master of life and death. Jesus Christ raises the dead as easily as He performs the commonest actions of life. He speaks as Master to those who sleep the sleep that knows no waking. You feel at once that He is God of the dead, as of the living,—never more calm than when He is doing the grandest of His works."*

* Massillon (quoted by Trench).

III.

LAZARUS OF BETHANY.

JOHN xi. 35-53.

THE silence of the first three Gospels as to the raising of Lazarus is explicable on either of two lines of suggestion; and the explanation is strengthened by their coincidence, which is also possible. The Synoptics relate the Galilean words or works, and for the most part omit the Judean. The fourth Gospel pursues the converse method. Within the particular class of miracles before us—The Raisings from the Dead—this is the exact state of the case. The first three omit this last and greatest Resurrection miracle. But the fourth Gospel omits the two which the Synoptists give. That St. John must have known of the two former is undoubted. That the other Evangelists knew of the Lazarus miracle is by analogy to be assumed. But as St. John did not feel impelled to relate the former to lead up to this one, neither did the Synoptists feel the need for giving this last as the crown of theirs. The other line of explanation suggests that there may have been need for their withholding it. There is an obvious reticence in all their references to the family at Bethany. There is room, therefore, for the conjecture that in the oral and other sources on which their narratives are

based, it was usual to veil the allusions to a family still living, one member of which, at least, would have been otherwise brought into dangerous prominence. All need for such reticence had passed away when the fourth Gospel came to be written.*

The steps which in St. John's account lead up, through the charming narrative, to the miracle itself, are these: When the news reached Him of His friend's sickness, Jesus sent back to the distressed sisters a message which was an implicit prediction of the miracle (ver. 4), "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God." Then in conversation with the disciples about His return to Judea, He lets fall the expression (ver. 11), "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." No doubt this opens up the Christian mode of speech about death. It was fitting that He who saw the other side should thus speak of the death He was about to destroy. The hint of a special intention in this particular case, however, is plain enough. Then comes the conversation with Martha (ver. 23), "Thy brother shall rise again." Martha shrinks from following out her own timid hint (ver. 22), "Whatsoever Thou wilt ask, even now, God will give it Thee." She takes His reply to speak only of the far-off general Resurrection, which she treats as cold comfort to her present consuming grief. But as His wont ever is, He puts a Living Person instead of an abstract dogma (ver. 25), "I am the Resurrection and the Life." 'Not to believe in the God whom I reveal, and in the Redemption which I bring, is the only death. The other is but a name, and shall vanish.' "Believest

* Compare the way in which John alone gives Peter's name as he who used his sword in the garden, though all the Synoptists record the fact.

thou this?" Martha's answer is full of simple honesty. It was the best thing she could have said. It means, 'I do not understand all these words of Thine, or dare not think I do, but I trust Thee,' "I believe that Thou art the Christ the Son of God" (ver. 27). We are familiar through the study of these records with the method of Jesus. Whenever He is to do any of His wondrous works He first kindles the spark of faith in the hearts of those concerned, and fans it by His skilful questions into a clear flame, that by the light of it His miracle may be justly seen. So here, He reasons with Martha, draws out her faith from a vague, blind trust to a distinct and conscious confession of His Christhood. Not yet does she expect the event, not yet is all her unbelief slain. It has to receive another blow from Jesus' hand presently. But faith and expectation are now firmly riveted on Him.

Then we come to the story of His own emotions after the meeting with both sisters has been described, and they set out, all three, to the scene of the great Wonder which is to follow.

Ver. 35-7. "*Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how He loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?*" It is as Jesus moves along towards the grave of Lazarus that His tears flow, and the sight suggests to the beholders two opposite remarks made most likely by oppositely-minded parties. Then said the Jews, "Behold how He loved him!" A valuable testimony to the naturalness and the genuineness of His human emotions. "And some of them said,"—a phrase used to indicate the less favourably minded. If He opened the eyes of the blind, could He not have prevented the death of this,

His friend? The miracle done on the man sent to the Pool of Siloam was one that had agitated Jerusalem on one of His former visits, and it is now remembered. No mention is made by these inhabitants of the capital of the two raisings from the dead which took place in Galilee. These were probably discredited, even if heard of, in Jerusalem. And they now half-insinuate that even the Siloam miracle could not have proved real power, since so little power is shewn by Jesus here in a case where He is believed to have had so much heart and wish to do a good turn. These natural human tears are accepted as evidence that He had no power to do more than weep. He is so human; He cannot be Divine,—instead of seeing the glorious truth to be that He is so evidently and supremely both in one.

Ver. 38. "*Jesus therefore groaning again in Himself* cometh to the grave.*" The groan was wrung from Him doubtless partly by these words of unbelief just uttered. But there are several sources of the emotion here expressed, some of them tenderly human, others sublimely superhuman. The sorrow of the sisters drew out His sympathy, the murmurs of the Jews chafed upon His spirit, but deeper still was the perception by His clear-seeing eye of that which was the cause of all—the indignation felt by the Lord of Life at that which sin had wrought. With this repeated expression of His profound emotion, He went forward to the grave. "*It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it*" (or, "*against it*"). This, like many other touches in the narrative, indicates the social position of the Bethany family. It was not a common burial-place among many, but like what we call a family vault. These were caverns, partly natural, partly artificial in some rocky hill, probably in imitation of the

* "Being moved with indignation in Himself," R.V., margin.

ancestral cave of Machpelah, to which the Jew looked back with such reverence. These vaults usually had a stone at the entrance, either like a cover or trough-stone, when the cave was vertical, or like a door when it was horizontal, to keep out beasts of prey; often used also as a memento of the dead. Jesus bids roll it away, when a significant incident occurs. Martha interposes. It is she, so attentive to all proprieties, so observant and so active, that even grief cannot absorb her incessant care. It is she who now cries out that it would be impossible to approach the remains, considering the time they had been in the tomb. She thinks Jesus wants to see the body, and she—"*the sister of him that was dead*" (ver. 39)—shrinks from the exposure of the corpse. Or, perhaps, she surmises that after all Jesus means to do something; but a feeling of the glaring impossibility of the thing gets the better of her, and she cries out, as if protesting against any attempt on the part of Jesus to grapple with Death's power.* It is just her former cry, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here" something might have been done then, but, alas! nothing can be done now. It is all over; he has been dead four days.

That this was her meaning our Lord's answer shows. He reminds her of His former implied promise (ver. 40), "*Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*" He had prepared these friends and followers of His to expect the event. Were not these the steps by which He had led them on? 'This is no death.' 'It shall be for

* "It was the common Jewish idea that corruption commenced on the fourth day, that the drop of gall, which had fallen from the sword of the Angel and caused death, was then working its effect, and that as the face changed, the soul took its final leave from the resting-place of the body."—*Edersheim, "Jesus the Messiah,"* i., 324.

the glory of God.' 'Thy brother shall rise again.' 'I am the Resurrection,'—steps dark enough to nature, impossible to unbelief, but plain to faith. Let us mark the secret of Faith's progress. Each step is taken in absolute dependence on the Lord. Unbelief says, '*Seeing* first, then *believing*.' Faith, or rather Faith's Lord, says, '*Believing* first, and then *seeing*.' What an end of triumph He prepares for this "more excellent way"! Faith—

"Laughs at impossibilities,
And says, It shall be done!"

"*Take ye away the stone*," Jesus had said (ver. 41, *a*), "*Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid*." He employed natural means to remove natural obstructions, that His Divine power might come face to face with the supernatural element. He puts forth supernatural power to do just that which no less power could accomplish; but all the rest—removing the stone beforehand, loosening the grave-clothes afterwards—He bids men do in the ordinary way. No doubt the power which could call Lazarus from the sleep of death included power to rend the rocks, roll away the stone, strip off the grave-bands without human aid. But mark the reticence of power—the Divine modesty, if we may so say, of the miracle which tells us that this setting aside for once of the stern law of Death is the work of Him who is the Lord of law, and respects it in all His worlds—the Author not of confusion, but of peace. To have done these other things without means would not have rendered the true marvel greater, it would only have added something of prodigy to miracle, which Jesus never did. What is still more to the purpose, it would have been out of keeping with His working, who never wastes His power, who never

confuses the natural and the supernatural, the human and the Divine. In His all-wise hand the two systems are one plan. The supernatural is never made to do the work of the natural, but the natural is the basis and preparation for the supernatural.

The principle is a most important one, and most pointedly applicable to the kingdom of grace. You say, if God means to save my friend, or my child, His salvation will be of grace; and grace is wholly supernatural. The new heart is a Divine gift; nothing but an immediate act of Divine power will make him a new creature; just as nothing but the voice of Jesus could call Lazarus from the tomb. True! yet He bids you 'take away the stone.' Remove ignorance, root up bad habits, implant good ones, rescue your neglected brother from degradation and misery. Give your children Christian education, prepare their minds to receive the truth in Jesus. Do these things, then may you pray and look for the raising of the morally lifeless. But if you do nothing; if you neglect to teach, to train, to strive and pray for them, wonder not if they sink into utter ungodliness and spiritual death.

Ver. 41, *b.* "*And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me.*" Now the attention of the whole multitude is arrested. He is on the eve of some great act. The disciples and the sisters, already prepared by the various steps through which He has led them, are transfixed in eager expectation. The company gathers round Him at the grave's mouth with a solemn awe. He prays. He lifts up His eyes to heaven. He addresses God by that name in the use of which He had already so offended the Jews. With holy familiarity and boldness, needing no introductory adoration, and using no names of

worship, but as a Son in His love and confidence, He says simply, "Father!" And then follows—what? Not an impassioned supplication, not the wrestling and struggling of a prophet with death, gaining a hearing with God, and winning back a soul to life by his agonies and cries. Not so! Jesus' prayer is already granted. Before He left Bethabara—perhaps even before the message came about His friend's sickness—He had made His request unto God, asking, in the raising of Lazarus, a step needful to the unfolding of His Messiahship. Here He openly gives thanks that it is already heard; shewing His perfect confidence in His power with God that the answer should come, His standing on a quite different footing from that of any prophet or messenger of God, and His foresight of the result.

Ver. 42. "*I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people that stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me.*" Both the event and its accompaniments were fitted to produce this impression. The miracle itself was overwhelming as a proof of power with God. But the manner of it, the thanksgiving here uttered beforehand, the address to God, the name by which He calls Him, all would convey the impression to the witnesses, not of a mere prophet, like Elijah or Elisha, but of the Son of the Father, and the sent of God.

Vv. 43, 44. "*And when He thus had spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.*" More exactly what He cried was, "Lazarus! hither! forth!" without a verb at all. The simple grandeur, brevity, and force of this resurrection-call corresponds with the mighty effect. The great voice or shout, from One who was wont to speak so gently and quietly, thrilled

the heart of every listener. Stillness and fear, for some moments, held possession of the whole company. Every eye was riveted on the dark mouth of the opened sepulchre. The echo of the loud cry had hardly ceased when a figure stood sharply outlined against the gloom, in its swathing of white linen, and in a moment more sprang forward, struggling with the grave-bands, and eager to throw himself at his Redeemer's feet. We can almost share the mingled pulse of fear and joy that throbbed through that crowd as he "*that had been dead*" came forth. The instinctive shudder and recoil—just for an instant—from what seems a walking corpse. Then, the forward wave, the rush of joyous recognition, when they saw that it was Lazarus alive. Next, eagerly clustering round, they help him off with the grave clothes. They unbind the napkin from his face. At the word of Jesus, and almost as soon as it was spoken, "*they loose him, and let him go.*" The significance of this mighty deed we cannot over-estimate, for it is, on the one hand, a profoundly significant symbol of Christ's redemption, and, on the other, a signal testimony to His right and power to redeem. Whether we regard it as a *symbol* or a *witness*, it is equally noteworthy.

1. This great transaction was an eminent emblem of Christ's regenerating and soul-quickening work; and that both in the details and in the substance. The details if followed out make an almost complete allegory of spiritual resurrection. The sinner, like Lazarus, is dead, buried, we may say already corrupt and loathsome. Christ comes Himself to the sinner's tomb. He bids, 'Take away the stone.' He calls His servants to ply all preliminary means. He sends His agents to warn and teach. But when all this is done there is no

life till He calls. He cries with a loud voice. It is the "effectual call" of His word and spirit. The man hears, the dead lives, the soul is converted. Then, once more, comes in the use of means. Remove hindrances; explain to the restored soul the way of life more perfectly. Let him use all appointed helps for enlargement and strengthening. Let the living help their new-raised brother—"Loose ye him, and let him go." Not to dwell on detail, let us note that the hinge of comparison between the spiritual and the literal resurrection is that the moving power of both is the Divine in the human, God manifest in Jesus Christ.

(1) The *Divine* element in the transaction. The mighty shout which raised Lazarus of Bethany was not the prayer of a mortal. It was the command of God. St. Paul lays it down as an axiom that it is the part of God alone "to quicken the dead, and call those things that be not, as though they were." * The act of resurrection and the act of creation stand, he says, upon the same rank. Both are supernatural; beyond human comprehension and human power. To speak to the dead that they may hear, to call the thing that is not as if it were, these are mysteries to human thoughts, and marvels to human power. If such things are to happen within the region of the actual and historic, it must be because a Divine element enters that realm —an act of God's free will. In creation He does a new thing, He says of that which had no existence before 'Let it be,' and it is. In resurrection He speaks to the dead. The dead hears, and lives. And now there is a third set of events which we must place in the same rank. He calls the unregenerate soul, in which there is no grace, no faith; He says 'Believe

* Rom. iv. 17.

and live,' and that soul springs up to spiritual being. In these three acts, Creation, Resurrection, Regeneration, or the spiritual birth, we have a miracle of the same kind—a direct act of Divine power. The Divine will is first cause, without the intervention, in the act itself, of any second cause whatever. The loud voice at the grave of Lazarus was an emblem of the Divine element in every conversion—the mystery and marvel which every conversion implies. That Jesus raised Lazarus was plain. How He did it was hid from the onlookers. So in regeneration—that the Divine Spirit alone quickens will be evident, but the mode of operation remains mysterious and inexpressible.*

(2) This power which raises the dead is the power of God, in the *voice of Jesus*. The Father hath given all things into His hands,—the spiritual creation and the natural alike; the spiritual resurrection now, as, on a future day, the literal and general. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself."† Jesus in the Church now is the Life of it. His spirit works as a spirit of life. He calls—men hear and live. The Son of God carries on His Father's work of raising men from the dead. The spiritual resurrection is going on. One rises and leaves his lusts and base passions, and becomes a sober, true, God-fearing man. Another leaves his poor legal strivings, and becomes a humble debtor to the grace of God for righteousness. Another rises from the tomb of doubt —that "creeping palsy of the mind, despair of truth"— and sits clothed at the Redeemer's feet. Another flings

* John iii. 8. † John v. 25, 26.

his dumb idols and gilded saints to rottenness, and turns to Jesus. The voice by which all these are awakened is the voice of the Son of God. To some it comes as the gentle whisper spoken over the dead maiden newly fallen on sleep, and not yet dressed for burial; to others, in the more peremptory tones addressed to the corpse on its bier at the gate of Nain. To others, again, it comes in the loud voice uttered at the door of the tomb where the dead had lain four days. The Son of God in this hour that now is, and through this gospel that we preach, is causing the dead in sin to hear His voice and come forth. Blessed are they who have part in this first resurrection!

2. This act is a supreme testimony to the Divinity and glory of Jesus. The whole manner, accompaniment, and consequences of the miracle mark it as the chiefest of His mighty deeds. It was done in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, in the broadest day, in the greatest publicity. A large number of credible witnesses, intelligent, and no wise friendly to Jesus, saw and heard the whole transaction. Jesus cried with a loud voice. The dead man, on the instant, leapt out of the open sepulchre bound in the grave-clothes,—for there had been no preparation and no possible collusion. To add to all, the subject of the miracle himself, whose testimony was the strongest, was in evidence—lived and continued to live for years afterwards. Hundreds and thousands of people crowded out to Bethany to see the man who had come back from the other world, at Jesus' word; while those that hated Jesus, instead of attempting to disprove the facts, which they certainly would have done had there been the slightest chance of success, saw no way of arresting the overwhelming

tide of popular conviction but by putting both Jesus and Lazarus to death. By this stupendous deed so publicly wrought, so universally and undeniably witnessed, Jesus' claim to be the Christ was brought to a climax. Those who opposed His claims had no longer any plausible excuse for doubt—it became hostile denial. They simply resolved not to believe in Him. They would not have Him to be their Messiah, let His claims be never so clear. His followers were confirmed beyond the possibility of doubt. Their numbers were swelled by remarkable accessions. Many of the eye-witnesses became from that moment faithful disciples. Many more of those who crowded to Bethany from all parts to see Lazarus, "went away, and believed on Jesus." His triumphal entry at the next Passover was formed of those who had been with Him when He raised Lazarus, and the whole city was moved, and went forth to meet Him, because of the fame of this recent and mighty miracle.* Thus His enemies had no alternative but to plan His betrayal and death. Whatever reasons the first three Evangelists had for not recording this miracle (and some of these we can easily imagine), it is clear what reason led St. John to record it at such length. It is the keystone of the whole narrative (as given in all the Gospels) of our Lord's Last Days and Passion, for it explains how His entire ministry was brought to a crisis.

It serves exactly the same purpose in modern thought as it served in the history of its own time. If we would bring any writer or speaker on the character and claims of Jesus to a test, let us see what he makes of the raising of Lazarus. At that point he must either

* John xii. 9-18.

worship Jesus of Nazareth or crucify Him.* The reason is very plain. Admit the historical character of the transaction—imposture is out of the question—and this deed establishes the Gospel. There is no prodigality of such works. Sufficient that He shewed the reality of the other world, that He brought life and immortality to light, that He gave proof and pledge of the Resurrection of the body, and that He asserted beyond the possibility of denial His own power as the Son of God. This one act unbelievers themselves have acknowledged to have been enough. "If I could be persuaded," said Spinoza (as Bayle reports him) "that Jesus did really raise Lazarus, I would shatter my own system to pieces, and embrace without hesitation the faith of a Christian."

The fact that Lazarus was four days buried,—the whole details of the story, and its undoubting acceptance as fact by Jews, hostile and friendly, have prevented any reputable commentator from supposing that the death was not real. Some, however, ask whether Lazarus was really in the other world or only in an unconscious state. If truly departed, where he was during the four days; what he could or did make

* Exactly here, it is, that Renan shatters his ideal Jesus, by making Him complicit, however reluctantly, in a pious fraud of the Bethany family. Strauss exerts all his skill to compile the elements of a mythical history, such as he thinks was here invented by the author of the fourth Gospel. Scarcely has he persuaded even himself, as his restless return to the question in later writings shews. Not thus is fiction written; especially not thus in the second century, as Godet well says,—witness the apocryphal gospels. Renan, too, has become ashamed of his earlier *fiasco*, and now falls in (see his thirteenth edition) with the weak recent theory, that a parable has been mistaken, in the evangelic tradition, for a history. So these negative critics toil and vex themselves in vain, while this matchless narrative, presenting a Jesus so tenderly human, so absolutely Divine, stands untouched. Nothing but the actual historic appearance of such a Being can account for the record.

known of the experience through which he had passed. The questions are very idle. An old tradition tells us that he was thirty years of age when he was raised, and that he lived thirty years thereafter. Another tradition weirdly tells us that the first question he asked of Jesus was whether he should die again, and being answered in the affirmative, was never seen afterwards to smile. We should like to picture with one great Christian poet of our time the wondrous moral elevation of this restored life,—

> "Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
> Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven." *

We should like to ask, with the other, why "he told not" of the life beyond, or if so, "what sealed the lips of that Evangelist?" † But no doubt these things are hidden from us in a wise and holy silence. Disclosures about them could not advance spiritual knowledge. The most minute and undeniable evidence about them does not of itself create saving faith. Thousands of Jews, at the time, were aware of the facts, with all the evidence for them which Spinoza himself could have craved, and in a few days afterwards they crucified the Lord of Glory.

* Browning, "*An Epistle of Karshish.*"
† Tennyson, "*In Memoriam*," xxxi., xxxii.

IV.

THE POST-RESURRECTION MIRACLE.

THE SECOND MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISHES.

JOHN xxi. 1-14.

THIS is the only incident after His resurrection which can be classed with our Lord's former mighty deeds. Not that it was the only supernatural incident of the Forty Days. The entire appearances and events of the Post-resurrection life were supernatural, and the Ascension crowned them. Nor were even these the last of our Lord's miracles, if we take a large enough view. Pentecost followed, with all the spiritual wonders of the New Dispensation. The miracles of the ministering Jesus were followed by the miracles of the risen Saviour, and these by the spiritual triumphs of the ascended Christ. The most recent of His miracles is the latest conversion of a human soul to His love, and the last of His miracles on earth will be the last conquest of His grace in this stage of His kingdom's history. But the incident before us fitly closes the series of those symbolic acts of power by which Jesus on earth sealed His ministry,—those signs which He did in their presence for the confirmation and instruction of His disciples.

As St. John alone records the "beginning of miracles" in Cana, it is fitting his Gospel should close with this idyllic scene of more than human beauty.

The open-air picture, the morning freshness, the naturalness of the incidents and characters, the simplicity of the narrative, stamp it with an incomparable grace. It was the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples, in a company or group, after He was risen from the dead. This re-appearance took place, not, like the two former ones, in Jerusalem, but by that favoured lake where so many of His mighty works had been done, whose shores and bordering hills were vocal with the echoes of His voice, whose waves had borne the impress of those "blessed feet, that bled for us on the accursed tree." It happened "on this wise." The apostles had not at once followed the instructions of the Resurrection Angel by leaving Jerusalem for Galilee, there to keep tryst with their risen Lord. Through the obstinacy of Thomas a whole week at least had elapsed. Jesus had meanwhile twice appeared to them assembled together in the capital. Even now, though on the appointed ground, they had not gone straight to the mountain of rendezvous, but were lingering by their own familiar haunts. They were seven, most of them natives of the lake-shore: Peter, seemingly restored to his lead; Didymus, no more faithless, but believing; Nathanael, whose conversion is related by John, and who is thought to be the Bartholomew of the other Gospels; "the two sons of Zebedee"—a phrase by the use of which the writer keeps his custom of never naming his brother nor himself; and two others, wholly nameless. "*Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee.*" There is a sparkle in this utterance as of men returning with glee to an old and favourite pastime, or throwing themselves with zest into something which will help to relax the strain of

excitement kept up for long by great events. There is also in it, especially on Peter's part, a fling as of impatience; not certainly anything so faithless as would have been "a renunciation of their hope to see Christ again before He went up on high," * yet the abruptness of his word tells of an uneasy desire to bury thought in instant action of some kind, to dull the keen edge of suspense by making as if they might just as well plunge back after all into common mundane life and toil. So we see them once more on their native lake, at their old employment, when to them, so employed, He comes. Let us note then—

1. *The manner of His coming.* They had toiled all night with no success. Morning light has come in, and they are drawing near the shore. A Stranger addresses them as soon as they are within hail. "*Children*—lads—*have ye any meat?*"—any relish one could have to eat with his bread? This is some traveller, doubtless, who wants his morning meal and would buy fish of them if they had caught any. But, friendly as he speaks, they have nothing to give him. "*They answered Him, No.*" "*Cast the net,*" He said, "*on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.*" You think they will be slow to take a stranger's advice, one not so likely to know as they, experienced fishers on that lake; nevertheless "*they cast therefore.*" A kind of instinct led them. They knew not the Speaker, yet they could not but do what He bade; and then the mystery was solved, for "*now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.*" The whole truth flashed into the mind of John, and it was like a sudden recollection. That very lake the scene, in Simon Peter's boat, after a fruitless night of toil "*Le*

* So Cox, in an ingenious reading of the scene with which one cannot quite agree. *Expositor's Note-Book*, p. 361.

down your nets for a draught," and then the instantaneous success. Though years had elapsed, (and such years!) it came all back to John's mind. 'Yes! The same voice I heard is here, though the eye cannot see Him, and cannot recognise Him.' John has no doubt of it, and he breathes the discovery to Peter, "*It is the Lord.*" Peter needs no more to act straightway like himself. "*When he heard that it was the Lord*," he tightened his fisher's coat about him, and dashed in over the nets, not to be outrun by John this time. "One would have liked to see him swim those hundred yards, and stagger to his knees on the beach." *

How like themselves are both these disciples. John is the first to perceive Jesus. The eagle-glance of faith is quick to see the Divine. With instinct of the loving heart, the bosom-friend is first to detect his Divine Friend's presence. 'Ah!' says he to himself, 'it is our Lord hath played us this loving trick,—it is His way.' He imparts the calm, quiet recognition to his brother apostle. How precious this faculty to note and point out the Divine in life, though it may be others that act. John is the *Seer*, the lover, the teacher; but Peter is the doer. It is Peter that plunges into the waves and gets first to Jesus' feet. So it always had been between these two. John was the first to reach the sepulchre, Peter the first to enter it; John the first to believe that Christ is risen, Peter the first to greet the risen Christ. Thus ever have we these two classes—the men of faith, the men of action; the men of thoughtful wisdom, and the men of loving zeal. The Church's eyes and the Church's hands,—all helpful to one another and needful for the body. John says to Peter, "It is the Lord," which Peter would not have perceived. Peter casts himself

* Ruskin.

into the sea, which John could not have done. "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor, again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." *

Well! the others get to the beach too in time, in such slow way as men in general do get in this world to its true shore, much impeded by that wonderful dragging the net with fishes. They, too, are eager to see this Stranger of whom now every heart holds a recognition, though the eye cannot attest that it is He. There a new wonder meets the view. A fire of coals burning on the shore, and fish laid thereon, and bread. When Jesus met them in the upper room first after His rising, He partook of their meal—broiled fish and a piece of an honeycomb. Now He provides for them, has all ready for them as they return, cold and weary, from their night's work. But He will not let them stand and gaze in mere wonder. "*Bring of the fish which ye have now caught;*" 'make use of the fruit of your labours; take care to secure the results.' They hastened to the beach,—Peter, ever foremost in action, at their head,—and "*drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.*" Their work done, He calls them to partake the morning meal. "*Come and break your fast.*" As they sit round the fire, and share His provision and their own, and He blesses, breaks, and parts it, as their Master so oft had done by that very shore, and on those sunny slopes, in humble Galilean homes, and in the city's upper room, they could not any more refuse the assent of their whole heart. 'This is Jesus once again!'

* 1 Cor. xii. 21-7.

"*None durst ask Him, Who art Thou? knowing that it was the Lord.*"

But why wish to ask Him? Where was the need? Plainly because the mere bodily sense cannot identify Him. There is some glory, or some change towards glory, which marks this and almost all the Post-resurrection appearances, so that the senses are puzzled. His comings and goings, His interviews with them all through the forty days, are not according to the ordinary laws of body. Consequently it is upon the evidence, not so much of the senses, as of the mind and heart, that they know Him to be their risen Saviour. His words, His actions, and the love that shines through all, tell them it is Jesus, and no one is so faithless and blind as to say, Who art thou that appearest thus in the guise of a stranger? And this is all significant. He is preparing them to live by faith in a world where Jesus shall no more be with them in the flesh. Therefore, even while still bodily present with them, He will disguise that presence, so that they shall perceive Him by faith and love, rather than by sense. He is training them for the time when even they that companied with Him from the beginning shall no more know their Master after the flesh, and when all disciples must walk by faith, not by sight. From such an interview as this one here described, which lies so deliciously pictured on a kind of borderland between faith and sense, it is plainly but another step, till believers see "no man," not even Jesus, in the garb of traveller or stranger, but hear His words, and feel His grace, and know the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, and feast with Him as really as these did by the Galilean sea, though now it is with One "whom, having not seen, we love, and

in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

2. *The meaning of the miracle.* It is easy to see that the purpose is different from that, for example, which appeared in the raising of Lazarus. After His own resurrection there was no need of any mere act of power to convince the disciples of His Godhead. That would have been taking the less to prove the greater. But there were two things they much needed. One was to get proof upon proof that Jesus was really risen. The other was, to learn how they should do His work when Jesus was not only risen, but gone away into heaven; and the point of this story is that it supplies both these things.

(1) It proved in a very striking way that their own Jesus it was who rose from the dead. Notice the particular proof afforded by this third appearance. Sometimes the appearing Saviour addressed their judgment, as when He reasoned with them out of the Scriptures that His rising again ought to have been expected by them. Sometimes He addressed their senses, as when He showed them His hands and His feet; when He ate before them, and said, You may be sure it is a true bodily resurrection, "for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have." But here He addressed their memory and their faith: You may be sure I am your own Lord, when I do again exactly as I did before, on this very lake, the works none other man could do. To repeat the miracle of the Draught of Fishes was to prove His identity in the most convincing way.

Some great tone-poet comes to you, and performs one of his masterpieces, and goes his way. The composition, let us suppose, has never been written out; no one could repeat it but the composer himself. Vainly

would any pretender appear and say, 'I am he,' for he could not produce the proof you would be sure to seek. You wait years, perhaps. A stranger comes. He says, I am your former friend; do you not recognise me? Time and travel have changed his countenance, the senses refuse to identify him in the usual way. 'I will prove it,' he says, seats himself at the instrument, calls out the marvellous and well-remembered strains. No other could so thrill you but himself. Yes, you say, it is beyond a doubt. I know him by his work. So, if the comparison may be pardoned, was it here. Even when the senses were baffled, the hearts of the disciples said, 'Yes! it is the same Christ. The same Jesus who lived and died is now risen again, for He does the same things, in giving us again great store of fish.' This is the highest kind of proof for the identity of the risen One. Is He identical in body because of the print of the nails and the gash of the spear? Is He identical in being because Mary calls Him Rabboni, and all the eleven say it is the Lord, and Thomas adds, 'My Lord and my God'? Then is not this third—the proof of identity in power and glory—the crowning proof of all? This must be Jesus; no phantom in His likeness, no delusive appearance, but the same Christ of God, at whose command are all the treasures of Nature and Providence, and under whose feet are also the fish of the sea, for He is head over all things, to His body the Church.

(2) It was not only a seal of their Lord's resurrection, it was also a symbol of their future work. The first miraculous draught of fishes had been a parable as much as a miracle. Jesus said to them in the first moment of their astonishment then, "Fear not; ye shall catch men," and from that hour Peter, Andrew,

James, and John left all and followed Him. Would not these men feel in their deepest hearts the meaning of this repeated sign from their risen Lord? Was He not saying, Now I send you out, in a wider sense than ever, to be fishers of men? In these closing interviews He was preparing them for their great work of carrying His Gospel into all the earth. They were about to embark on the sea of the world, in His vessel, the Church. He was Himself no more to be with them in bodily presence. Henceforth He would stand upon the heavenly shore. Many a night, dark and dreary, they would have to toil profitless; but as oft as He should command, the net would be filled. At last, they would draw it to land, the success of His kingdom would be complete and glorious beyond all expression. His faithful servants would share His triumphs, and inherit the fruit of their labours, enter into their rest followed by their works, and on the resurrection morning they would sit down to meat with Him in His everlasting kingdom.

One is tempted to dwell on this attractive allegory a little longer, there are so many things suggested by the details of the charming story. (*a*) Here are seven fishermen, well equipped, well acquainted with the waters they fish in, toiling all night, and nothing caught. Yet, at the Master's word, casting on the right side, the net is filled. The servants of the kingdom may be well furnished, well placed, well acquainted with their work outwardly, yet not thereby is their real success secured. It is the Lord's presence and the Lord's command that makes it sure. It is for His servants to watch well for all such directions, and to follow them promptly and fully. The thing which made the difference here is most suggestive. An activity based upon

mere human impulse and sympathy,—"I go a fishing. We also go with thee"—was fruitless. That which drew its inspiration from the word of Christ had immediate success. (*b*) A conversation about non-success opens the way for better things; so the Lord oft begins the blessing with His Church and servants when He makes them feel and be concerned about the want of blessing. He, first, unknown to us, operates upon us by a sense of need, a discovery of poverty, and then presents us with an opportunity of repairing that need. (*c*) The blessing and the success come by casting the old net in a new way, in a new direction. It is the unchanging Gospel that we are to preach, it is the once-delivered and imperishable salvation; but in each age and time it needs new castings, fresh forms, it must be put on the right side of the ship, and it is the ever living Spirit that will keep us right with His progressive indications.

The meal on the shore, too, is suggestive of many things besides the final feast of heaven. It is, indeed, more strictly suggestive of "times of refreshing" upon earth, for it is early in the day, fitting for more labour. Where Jesus got the fish and bread and fire of coals, we are not told, but there it was ready; and how like the gracious surprises He prepares for His faithful servants. Surprising success followed by surprising satisfaction and soul comfort. Unusual labours and unusual fruitfulness followed by unusual communion with Himself,—festive moments, when Christ holds a feast with His people upon the heights of a new world. Times of reformation, revival, gospel success and spiritual gladness, followed, maybe, by other days of toil and nights of watching. Then note how His extraordinary provision beforehand did not exclude their contribution to the meal. "Bring of the fish which ye

have *now* caught." The joy of the Spirit and the success of the Church go hand in hand, and re-act upon each other. He can give meat to eat that the world knows not of, but He would have us not only feast with Him; He proposes to feast with us, to see of the travail of His soul, and take pleasure in the work of which He honours us to be the instruments. The scene was, in short, a prophetic picture of ordinary Christian life and work, as it was to be after He left the earth: of its contrasts and changes, its usual hard work and its occasional joy, its humility and loftiness, poverty and abundance, activity and rest, the times of yearning for Him, and the other times of rejoicing in His presence.

Some would carry the prophetic teaching of this passage still farther. So far we may safely go in regarding it as a noble prophecy of the Church's future. It is possible to go into a comparison of the first miraculous draught of fishes with this its duplicate. There are some shades of difference undoubtedly suggestive, making the first a fit picture of the Church now as she struggles with the evils of earth; the latter of the Church perfected in the glory of the last days. In the former miracle, the cast was indifferent: the nets broke, the boats were sinking, the quantity of the catch was indefinite, and the quality not characterised. In this, the duplicate miracle, the cast is made on the "right side," the net was not broken for all there were so many, the fish were all landed, they are exactly numbered, and they were all great fishes. In the former instance the Master was still on board among the fishers. Here He was waiting on the shore. It would not be profitable to carry out the explanation into all these details. "Yet it seems impossible not to acknow-

ledge a spiritual meaning in these variations which consistently converge to distinct ends."* One can see how, in general, the former represents a state of imperfection, of partial failure, of mixed good and ill; the latter a state of absolutely perfect and secured good—a work accomplished and complete. In short, this was an acted prophecy. No doubt as such the memory of it cheered the hearts of the apostles after Jesus departed from earth, as it has upheld His servants ever since. We are in the ship; He is on the land. He sees all our work and oversees it. Dark though it be by night, little though we seem at times to succeed, He guides the casting of the net. He will secure the result of glory and success. In the morning all shall be safely brought to land. His number shall be complete. He will lose nothing. What a surprise of joy to His toil-worn servants when they gather round their Lord on the eternal shore! Oft had they said on earth, 'Who hath believed our report? We have caught nothing.' But lo! His house is filled, His table furnished, His guests are all there! What a morning of joy after nights of weeping! What a harvest-home after the sowing-time of tears!

* Westcott, *Commentary on St. John's Gospel, in loc.*, who gives most of these points of analogy from a well-known passage of Augustine. For many ingenious patristic interpretations of the number of fishes—153—see Westcott's "Additional Notes" on chap. xxi.

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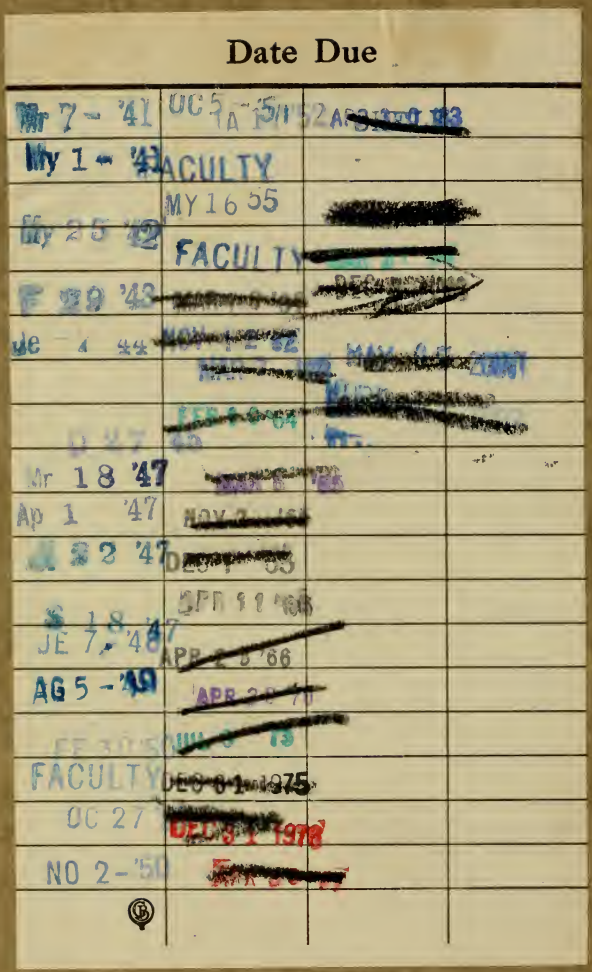
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